


JUDGES 11:1-11

SURVIVING A LOUSY START IN LIFE

“Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute. Gilead was the father of Jephthah. And Gilead’s wife also bore him sons. And when his wife’s sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, ‘You shall not have an inheritance in our father’s house, for you are the son of another woman.’ Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob, and worthless fellows collected around Jephthah and went out with him.

“After a time the Ammonites made war against Israel. And when the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah from the land of Tob. And they said to Jephthah, ‘Come and be our leader, that we may fight against the Ammonites.’ But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, ‘Did you not hate me and drive me out of my father’s house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?’ And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, ‘That is why we have turned to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the Ammonites and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.’ Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, ‘If you bring me home again to fight against the Ammonites, and the Lord gives them over to me, I will be your head.’ And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, ‘The Lord will be witness between us, if we do not do as you say.’ So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and leader over them. And Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord at Mizpah.”¹

ontemporary Canadians excuse almost every failure on the basis of victimisation. Everyone is a victim in contemporary society; failure seems always to be the fault of someone else or result from circumstances beyond our control. One of the most common avenues of excuse for failure is to claim a poor start in life. By 2002, one in four children was being raised in a one-parent home,² virtually ensuring a poor start to life. Married families had a median income of \$64,800, whereas single-parent families reported a median income of only \$29,500. Consequently, poverty—frequently self-imposed by parental choice—is commonly used as an excuse for crime, for academic failure, and for low achievement in life.

Throughout the years of my service to the people of God, I have witnessed the transformation of society into a culture of victimisation. Drinking to excess is not the fault of the drunk—he is sick. The drug addict can’t help herself—there is too much stress in life and she can’t cope. The thief can’t really be held accountable—she has been deprived of life’s pleasures. The rapist is not responsible for acting on his impulses—women dress in a provocative fashion. The homosexual can’t be responsible for his choices—God made him that way.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² The Canadian Encyclopedia, “Marriage and Divorce” (article), <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0005119>, accessed 13 April 2010

Whatever the deficit, whatever the aberration, someone else is always responsible. Politicians may be blamed for creating much of this mess, but it was preceded by retreat from the biblical injunction to accept responsibility for our choices. Tragically, culture has invaded the churches, so that rather than serving as salt in the midst of a decaying world, the rot of the world has invaded the churches of our day. Repentance is an unknown concept among contemporary churches. Consequently, there are few leaders within modern ecclesiastical life who are willing to say, as did David, “I have sinned” [see 2 SAMUEL 2:13]. Nor did David merely confess sin when he had failed morally. When he sinned by doubting the LORD, his confession was “I have sinned greatly” [see 1 CHRONICLES 21:8]. Even when exposed in egregious moral failure, too many of the professed saints of God excuse moral and ethical lassitude by blaming lousy teaching, by appeal to a poor start in their Christian walk, by attempting to blame someone else for their failure.

As background to the account before us, listen to JUDGES 10:17, 18. “The Ammonites were called to arms, and they encamped in Gilead. And the people of Israel came together, and they encamped at Mizpah. And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said one to another, ‘Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.’” The year is 1089 B.C. Israel is suffering another of the frequent invasions from the surrounding peoples that resulted from their wandering from the commands of God. The elders of the land were desperate, and they sought someone who would deliver them from the invaders. They turned to a most unlikely individual name Jephthah.

A POOR START IN LIFE — The first three verses are a flashback, introducing a man from the very place now suffering so horribly. The text informs us that he was the son of a prostitute and a man named Gilead. Perhaps that is not so important in this day, but throughout history, parentage has been very important. To say that Jephthah was hindered in life is understatement.

We are introduced to the man whose life is central to the account—his name was *Yiptāh*. The meaning of the name likely gives us some insight into his background, for the name means “He has opened,” demonstrating gratitude toward a deity who was credited with giving a child. The name likely was given by his mother, as his father did not immediately accept paternity. Thus, the name reflects the gratitude Jephthah’s mother felt for being enabled to bear a son. Fertility would have been of utmost concern in the culture of that day; and unlike this present day, the bearing of children would have been a woman’s highest goal. Thus, Jephthah’s mother expressed her gratitude by naming her child according to the gift of life.

What is not said is what deity she had in mind when she named her son. If we accept that Jephthah’s name was an abbreviated form, he might have been named *yiptāh-yhwh* (the LORD has opened the womb) or *yiptāh-’ēl* (God has opened the womb). The former name is optimistic, to say the least, whereas the latter is quite non-specific, for a deity called ‘Ēl was worshipped by Canaanites as was true for the Israelites. A third possibility that seems more likely in my estimate is that the boy was named *yiptāh-ba’al*, or “Baal has opened the womb.”³

³ For further information concerning these names, see Daniel Isaac Block, **The New American Commentary: Vol. 6, Judges, Ruth** (Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN 2001) 351

The fact that his mother is identified as a prostitute presents the very real possibility that she was not Jewish, but rather Canaanite. While Jewish women who were unable to provide for themselves might turn to prostitution as a means of providing for themselves and their children, such actions were clearly proscribed under the Law. Perhaps you recall the divine proscription, “Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, lest the land fall into prostitution and the land become full of depravity” [LEVITICUS 19:29]. Despite this interdiction against prostitution, the practise was distressingly common among the Canaanites; women, as well as men, would engage in cult prostitution as part of their religious devotion to Baal and Asherah. Thus, if Jephthah’s mother was a Jewess, her actions reveal that she was thoroughly canaanized. On the other hand, it is conceivable, perhaps even probable, that she was a member of one of the Canaanite races, in which case her actions would have been consistent with her culture.

If Jephthah’s mother was a cult prostitute working in a Canaanite cult centre, then it means that Gilead was a patron, contributing through his participation to the Canaanite religion. You would know that worshippers of the Living God were proscribed from having such intercourse with the Canaanites. God commanded, “Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods” [EXODUS 34:12-16].

This was such a serious issue that in the second iteration of the Law, God gave the same instructions. “When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than yourselves, and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire” [DEUTERONOMY 7:1-5].

The manner in which Jephthah’s half-brothers acted toward him and the willingness of his father to participate in prostitution (cultic or otherwise) lead me to conclude that the family was more readily identified as belonging to the land of Canaan than as belonging to God’s holy people. Again, this is a blot against the young man—in the best-case scenario his family was essentially devoid of any possibility of a vital relationship to the True and Living God. What is worse, this condition was the result of choice rather than mere ignorance.

Jephthah is identified as a true Gileadite—he was fathered by a man who bore that name. Though Gilead is technically a geographic designation, it was also used as a tribal and family eponym. What is evident from the text is that Gilead accepted Jephthah into the family, assuming a measure of responsibility as father of the boy. However, the text leads me to conclude that his other sons could not have been kind to the child Jephthah. They must have felt resentment against him, and it is difficult to believe that they did not express that resentment toward him during his formative years. What we do know about Gilead is that he had one wife, or at least one wife that bore him children. The text reads, “Gilead’s wife also bore him sons.”

Moreover, it would seem that Gilead had some wealth. Upon his death, he was able to leave an inheritance to his sons. It was enough that they were unwilling to permit Jephthah to have a share. Gilead’s name reflected a degree of nobility. The name Gilead first appears when given to a grandson of Manasseh through Machir [see NUMBERS 26:29]. This Gilead became head of the clan of Gileadites. Jephthah’s father bore the name of the clan, perhaps indicating a position of some stature.

However, after his death, his other children wanted nothing to do with Jephthah because his mother was a whore. They drove him out, denying him any possibility of sharing in their inheritance. Their rationale for this action was that Jephthah was “the son of another woman”—his mother was not acceptable in their estimate.

What may not be apparent today is that their action was a gross violation of Israelite law. The expulsion of their half-brother was based upon raw prejudice that Jephthah was “the son of another woman”—in their estimate, he was a social inferior. However, the Mosaic Law commanded that an Israelite was to act with compassion toward the outcast and to demonstrate care for the social inferior. This becomes abundantly clear as we read a somewhat extended passage found in Deuteronomy.

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good? Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen. Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven” [DEUTERONOMY 10:12-22].

Worshippers of the Living God were to love their neighbour, much less a brother, as revealed in the Book of Leviticus. “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” [LEVITICUS 19:33-34].

Beyond this requirement to be compassionate and considerate toward others, the action of Jephthah’s stepbrothers was a clear violation of Israelite inheritance law. Inheritance under Jewish law depended not upon the mother, but upon the father. Thus, their contention that his mother was a prostitute (for that was what they argued) was specious. Frankly, one can only conclude that they acted in greed in betraying their half-brother. It is yet further evidence that they had become thoroughly co-opted by the Canaanite attitude that permeated the land. Moreover, their decision would have had to have been ratified by the court system of the day!

Add up the marks against the young man—son of a prostitute, growing up in an environment that is more pagan than godly, unwanted by his siblings. Three strikes and the young man was out! Could it get any worse?

One feature of the Word of God that serves to verify the factual nature of what is written is the refusal to minimise the evil of those whose lives are recorded in its pages. Jephthah did, in fact, sink lower still. Perhaps in this day we would say that his descent was to be expected; what is evident is that with a poor start in life, he did make further choices that compounded the negative features of his life. Driven from home, we next see him as leader of the Tob Mob.

One current translation translates the third verse, “Lawless men joined Jephthah’s gang and travelled with him.”⁴ We can understand that! He formed a gang! Perhaps what occurred was not planned, but deliberate or not, Jephthah became a gang leader. The men who gathered to Jephthah are variously described as “riffraff,”⁵ “men who weren’t good for anything,”⁶ “outlaws,”⁷ or “worthless men.”⁸ There is one piece of information that will be helpful in understanding the exploits of this gang. The normal word that would be used to describe those gathering to an individual is the word *asaph*, but the Hebrew uses the word *lakat*, a word associated with gleaning. In other words, this gang was the result of slow, deliberate recruitment rather than a sudden mass following. Jephthah deliberately recruited on the basis of courage and ability the men who would follow him in this gang.

This gang of brigands gathered in Tob, a desolate region just outside of the eastern boundary of Israel, near Ramoth Gilead and north of Ammon. Tob had once been allied with the Ammonites in a battle against David [2 SAMUEL 10:6-8], though it appears later to have been incorporated into David’s Kingdom, likely through conquest. Jephthah’s gang lived by conducting raids, probably against the Syrians and the Ammonites near whom he lived, though it cannot be denied that they possibly raided villages of Gilead as well.

⁴ **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2006)

⁵ **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2002)

⁶ **The Holy Bible: New International Reader’s Version** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1998, 2007)

⁷ **The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version** (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN 1989)

⁸ **The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation**, 2nd edition (American Bible Society, New York, NY 1992)

SHOWING HIMSELF MIGHTY — In Tob, Jephthah gained a reputation as “a mighty warrior.” The phrase could be translated as, “a noble man,” but in light of the subsequent approach of the elders of Gilead and in light of the knowledge that he had been expelled by his step-brothers, it is doubtful that he was considered a nobleman. He was, however, a warrior of some renown. Undoubtedly, the exploits of Jephthah and his gang during the raids against surrounding peoples taught him how to fight.

What should be apparent upon reading this account is that when the writer speaks of Jephthah as “a mighty warrior,” he is not referring to his heritage. Jephthah had distinguished himself in battle. He was steadfast, courageous, skilled with the weapons at his disposal and able to think so that he could be depended on by his men. Undoubtedly, he had learned to plan and execute an ambush. He knew how to reconnoiter an enemy position. He had learned through the school of experience how to position his men for the best defence, and how to plan an assault when such was necessary.

Moreover, his prowess was generally recognised, even if his lifestyle was not appreciated. When the Ammonites invaded Israel, the leaders sought for someone to lead them into battle. The Hebrew makes it clear that a period of time passed as the elders sent out word that they needed a volunteer. When no one came forward to accept the challenge of leadership, these leaders sent to Tob to find the bad boy who was showing himself successful in warfare. The elders were desperate, and now the very one whom they had unceremoniously sent away was the only person capable of leading an armed force against the invaders.

The negotiations between the elders and Jephthah were tense. It is apparent that they found it distasteful that they were now forced to approach Jephthah. It is equally apparent that he was less than enthralled with their approach to him. When the leaders first presented their case, they appealed neither to national or tribal loyalty, nor yet to the vital role Jephthah could play in delivering God’s people in a critical hour. Previously, they had offered those who were “full citizens” opportunity to be “head (*rōš*) over all the inhabitants of Gilead” [JUDGES 10:18]. However, the elders offered Jephthah something less. “Come and be our leader (*qāsîn*).” The word conveys the thought that he would be a military leader, but that he would have no authority over the people other than in war. These leaders were precise and careful to offer him less than they had offered others.

However, Jephthah realised that he held the trump card; perhaps word had reached him relating their earlier offer to those who were “full citizens.” So, he negotiated a greater position for himself than they had been prepared to offer. He reminded them that they had driven him from his father’s house and dispossessed him of his birthright; they had sentenced him to a life of perpetual distress. Why should he be a mere tool to be used by them now that they were in distress? “If you bring me home again to fight against the Ammonites, and the LORD gives them over to me, I will be your head (*rōš*).” Jephthah recognised their perfidy and negotiated himself a better deal. If you follow the argument, he is negotiating that he will be reinstated as a full citizen of Gilead with all the rights and privileges that went with that citizenship.

Having gained their agreement—even certified with an oath (“The Lord will be witness between us, if we do not do as you say”), Jephthah was not content to trust their word. Immediately, he journeyed with the elders to Mizpah where he “spoke all his words before the LORD.” He ratified the agreement at the LORD’s sanctuary. It was a means of emphasising the obligation of the people to keep their part of the bargain. Though the people were essentially paganised, they still maintained a patina of their godly heritage in respect for the LORD God.

While one might argue that the LORD had neither initiated the selecting Jephthah as a Judge nor guided the elders in the process, Jephthah alludes to the role the LORD would need to play if he were to be successful: “If you bring me home again to fight against the Ammonites, and the LORD gives them over to me...” He has enough spiritual perspicuity to realise that God gives victory. Though man may prepare himself, yet it is the Lord God who gives victory.

Long years after Jephthah, the Preacher observed:

“I observed this on the earth:
the race is not always won by the swiftest,
the battle is not always won by the strongest;
prosperity does not always belong to those who are the wisest,
wealth does not always belong to those who are the most discerning,
nor does success always come to those with the most knowledge—
for time and chance may overcome them all.”

[ECCLESIASTES 9:11]

Solomon also observed:

“The horse is made ready for the day of battle,
but the victory belongs to the LORD.”

[PROVERBS 21:31]

Jephthah attempted diplomacy with the Ammonites, though he must have known that his appeals would not succeed. When diplomacy failed, he attacked. Reading the divine account, it is evident that he waged war in dependence upon the LORD. Though the people may have been compromised by adopting the lifestyles and attitudes of their pagan neighbours, and though his own beginning was inauspicious, Jephthah was dependent upon the LORD for victory. Therefore, we read, “The LORD gave them into his hand. And he struck them from Aroer to the neighbourhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramin, with a great blow. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel” [JUDGES 11:32b, 33].

APPLICATIONS FOR LIFE — There are several applications which suggest themselves as result of our study of Jephthah. Among the applications I suggest is one drawn from Jephthah’s brothers and one drawn from the elders of Gilead, and some that are drawn from Jephthah himself.

PAGANISM IS CONTAGIOUS. Looking at Israel in the days of Jephthah, it is difficult to believe that these are the people of God. Looking at professing Christians in this day, it is often difficult to believe that they are actually God's redeemed people. The reason for God's extreme commands concerning the Canaanites is that they had become utterly depraved, and depravity is contagious. God warned Israel not to make a covenant with the pagans "lest they make you sin against Me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you" [EXODUS 23:33]. This warning was iterated when God said through Moses, "Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst" [EXODUS 34:12].

Herein lies a truth that can only be neglected to our detriment. We turn this teaching around, assuming that holiness is contagious, while ignoring unrighteousness. We hope our children will somehow be influenced toward righteousness, all the while giving them just enough religion to inoculate them against righteousness while immersing them in a dying culture contaminated with evil. The LORD addressed this issue through the prophet Haggai. "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Ask the priests about the law: 'If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?' The priests answered and said, 'No.' Then Haggai said, 'If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?' The priests answered and said, 'It does become unclean.' Then Haggai answered and said, 'So is it with this people, and with this nation before me, declares the LORD, and so with every work of their hands. And what they offer there is unclean'" [HAGGAI 2:11-14].

People may be religious, but lost. Often they bear the name Christian while living as though the truths of the Faith were meaningless. Tragically, in this day many of the professed saints of the Most High God reflect more of the pagan culture in which we live than they do of the nature of the God whom they profess as Father.

CULTURE REFLECTS WHAT SOCIETY TOLERATES. Ultimately, what people have embraced is lived out, and the life that is lived expresses what is permitted. Your life reflects what you are prepared to tolerate; and collectively, what we tolerate as a society is what makes up culture. The cultural norms of our society are what we have accepted as tolerable.

Two incidents related in this account indicate that the culture of Gilead was corrupted by the unrighteousness of the people. The first is that when Jephthah was expelled by his brothers, the elders, functioning as the judicial arbiters of the land, would have had to ratify the decision. However, they would have known that he was the son of Gilead, and therefore due an inheritance regardless of who his mother was. That there is no mention of an inheritance and the fact that his brothers drove him out, lead me to conclude that the elders were compromised by the attitude of the land in which they lived.

Moreover, the elders dissimulated; they had determined among them that they would make whoever became their deliverer the head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. In JUDGES 10:18, we read, "The people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, 'Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.'" However, they neglected to mention this fact when they approached Jephthah.

Briefly focus attention on Jephthah, for there are some truths worthy of consideration. The first is that **A POOR START NEED NOT MEAN A POOR FINISH**. Certainly, Jephthah had a poor start in life: his mother was a prostitute; he was raised in an environment that was more pagan than godly; he was rejected by his brothers and cheated out of his inheritance; he became a gang leader living as an outlaw. There was nothing that would make us think that he could succeed. However, when opportunity presented itself, he succeeded in delivering the people of God.

It is not uncommon to witness God using people to His glory whom we could never imagine being of value to His cause. The judges of Israel are frequently seen as flawed individuals whom one is hard-pressed to imagine as a deliverer. However, one thing united them as judges, and that was reliance on God and devotion to the task at hand.

In a similar manner, it is of scant moment where you began in life—you can finish powerfully and to the glory of God. Certainly, that was true for Jephthah, and it was also true for the Apostle Paul. He was a persecutor of the Faith, opposed to all that is good and holy, and yet at the end of his days, he could affirm, “I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” [2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8]. It is of small moment how long you have been on the journey, what matters is how far you have come.

This brings me to another application that may be readily drawn from the life of Jephthah, and that is that **SUCCESS IS MEASURED BY DEVOTION TO THE WILL OF GOD**. Perhaps you recall the penetrating question Jesus asked of those who endeavoured to followed Him? “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself” [LUKE 9:25]?

This issue was so important that it is included in the account provided by three of the Evangelists. Matthew’s account is particularly insightful. “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” [MATTHEW 16:24, 25].

We tend to define success by the standard of this world. A successful pastor is one who gathers a large congregation and avoids controversy. A successful church is one which makes people feel good about themselves and does not hurt anyone’s feelings. A successful Christian is someone who has just enough religion to establish credentials as a worshipper of God but who avoids being fanatical about her faith. However, the criterion for success according to Jesus is somewhat different. He said, “Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” [MATTHEW 10:38, 39].

Note a final, universal truth: **DELIVERANCE BELONGS TO THE LORD, NOT TO MAN**. We labour to be all that we can be in order to glorify God, but ultimately, deliverance belongs to God, not to man. Jephthah understood this, as was demonstrated when he replied to the elders, “If ... the LORD gives [the Ammonites] over to me.” He does not doubt his ability, but he realises that in the final analysis, God gives victory.

Listen to the word of the Wise Man.

“The horse is made ready for the day of battle,
but the victory belongs to the LORD.”

[PROVERBS 21:31]

Indeed, the Psalmist is correct when he exults, “Salvation belongs to the Lord” [PSALM 3:8].

I have spoken of surviving a lousy start in life, and it is true that anyone can conclude life well if they choose well and focus on what matters. We are not automatons without the ability to choose. We are not at the mercy of unseen forces that permit us to excuse our situation. However, it is of no consequence how well we conclude life; if we are unprepared for what follows afterward life cannot ultimately end well for us. What I mean is that beyond the physical parameter, even beyond the emotional aspect of our existence, lies the spiritual. The Creator, God, gave each of us our being and to Him each one must give an account of what we have done. This is the basis for Solomon’s sobering assessment.

“Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”; before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low—they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets—before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” [ECCLESIASTES 12:1-7].

One can only end well if that one knows Him who gives life, and that is the offer of the Faith of Christ the Lord. Christ Jesus—very God in human flesh—gave His life as atonement for His fallen creature. He now calls all who desire life to faith in Him as the Risen Saviour. Therefore, the Word of God offers this hope to any who are willing to receive it, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” That passage concludes with the simple promise that is readily tested, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].

You can end life well, and you can receive eternal life which will give you peace with God and fill you with hope and joy. Why would you not receive that gracious gift? Do so now. Amen.