

“A Fleeting Moment into Eternity”—Isaiah 40:6-8

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “A Fleeting Moment into Eternity”, is Isaiah 40:6-8 → *A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” How? While a thousand words sounds like a lot it’s not really that much when engaging in simple conversation. In actuality, a picture says very little without a context. For instance, I found this picture in a file at home. As I looked it over I was actually at a loss for words. All I could do was describe it in a very linear fashion. There are ten people together in a place at different developmental stages of life. Even if I comment about their dress, facial features, expressions and hair color (if it were a color picture), I may find myself at a loss to come up with a hundred words.

However, that’s not the way we deal with pictures is it? Rather, as

you observe various aspects of the picture you may comment on what those aspects could be revealing to you. By way of imagination and interpretation you provide the context. It is only when you go beyond what is objectively placed before you that you have a lot to say in your conclusions drawn from a moment in time for ten individuals together in a particular place. It tells you nothing about their relationships with one another or what the rest of their lives are like, let alone what may have taken place in their interaction moments prior to this particular moment. Neither does it tell you anything about their individual physical, psychological, emotional or spiritual struggles. It is only a picture of a fleeting moment in time.

Each moment in time is very important to your own context . . . for the rest of your life. Think about how one moment in time can change the rest of your life, either positively or negatively. I can't help but think of that one moment in time when Adam & Eve "took the bait" and disobeyed God's one commandment, putting a whole different context on all the moments in time for all of God's creation (cf. Genesis 3; Romans 5:12-14; 8:29). Everyone now has to deal with sin and its many evidences in our lives.

Isaiah had a moment in time, experiencing Yahweh in a vision, changing the rest of his life (cf. Isaiah 6). As a Jerusalem insider, with access to the king's court, Isaiah saw firsthand the extravagance,

injustice, and spiritual failure of Judah's leaders. He would witness the lean years during the siege by the Assyrians. He would prophesy Judah's downfall to the Babylonians. He would see the Old Testament Church in chains but then set free, worshiping the LORD with those who had formerly oppressed them (cf. Isaiah 19:19–25). He became God's spokesman (i.e. prophet) to the people of Judah living in affluence, idolatry, and a growing indifference to God's Word.

Thus, Yahweh sent him to His people to bring them to a particular moment in time—the moment of repentance of sin and turning back to the LORD—the moment of confession and absolution. But why is such a moment so crucial and important in light of so many other important moments in life?

In verse 6 of our text Isaiah is told to proclaim (i.e. cry out) something to the people: *All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.* He goes on to explain his analogy: *The grass withers and the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it* (verse 7). His point is rather simple: Everything of *beauty* which this earthly life offers you is very fleeting. Within a moment of time it can wither and fade away, leaving only a memory of its existence. In fact, this is not only true of your stuff but also of your physical body, as Isaiah says in our text: *surely **the people** are grass.* Aside from being alive when Jesus returns in glory on the Last Day, death is inevitable for all people.

Psalm 103:15-16 says: *As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.* Addressing our audacious pride, thinking we are in control of the future, James says: *you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.* (cf. James 4:14) Such a reality of life caused the writer of Ecclesiastes to conclude that life is worthless, that all these moments in time are meaningless in view of the impending death to come. In fact, he went so far as to say that *the memory of the dead is forgotten* as well—much in the same way I look at this picture out of my family file with no memory, no clue as to their identity. Even if someone would have written down their names on the back of the picture I would still be at a loss for words as to my connection to them. Even such words eventually fade away. To whom will you turn to find comfort in the midst of such a destination for each moment in time?

Verse 8 of our text says: *The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.* The word which the prophet Isaiah proclaimed was the call to repentance **in light of a moment in time which Yahweh would eventually bring about, bringing comfort for His people when their sins are pardoned** (cf. Isaiah 40:1-2). Even though this moment in time came with their deliverance from captivity to Babylon some 200 years later, it ultimately came some 700 years later.

It came when Jesus Christ *gave Himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given **at the proper time*** (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus referred to it as His *hour* (cf. John 2:3; 7:30; 8:20; 13:1). *The Word of God stands forever in the Person & Work of Jesus, God's eternal Son.*

At a moment in time Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice, the propitiation for your sin. In other words, in the perfect life and sacrificial death of Jesus, God turns aside His wrath toward you because the punishment which His justice demands for your sin, Jesus took upon Himself. Thus, along with the prophet Isaiah, John the Baptizer and Jesus, God's servants still continue calling everyone to a moment in time: *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.* (cf. Mark 1:15) It is the moment in time when Jesus dealt with your sin once and for all. He provides the reason why you can repent of your sins and trust in His atoning work for you confidently.

Such repentance is not reserved for only one moment in time but is yours for all time and into eternity. 1 John 2:1-2 says that God's Word is given you *so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.* Confession and absolution is the rhythm of the Christian life which continues to deal with the presence of sin and the devil in this world of sin. While it may seem like life is still a never-ending series of

fleeting moments in time, they are fleeting moments which accompany you into eternity. They are all moments of faith in Jesus Who conquered the power of the devil, Who released you from the enslavement to sin and the permanence of the grave. They are moments within which you can live confidently in God's *comfort* because *the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, will purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God* (cf. Hebrews 9:14).

My picture is "worth a thousand words" only if someone can put words to it which explain the identities of those in it. However, God's Word gives a context of these peoples' lives as sinners for whom Jesus lived, died and rose again to give meaning to their fleeting moments into eternity. Because of a moment which appeared fleeting to the people who experienced the moment of Jesus' crucifixion, you are brought into an eternally perfect relationship with God. Thus, your moments in time may be fleeting but they are not meaningless. Rather, they are sanctified moments within which the Holy Spirit brings the Word of God into the moments of other peoples' lives as well. After all, *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever* (cf. Hebrews 13:8). Amen.

*You have been born again,
not of perishable seed but of imperishable,
through the living and abiding word of God;*

for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers, and the flower falls,

but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

(1 Peter 1:23-25)

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