

Grace and peace are yours through our eternal Savior Jesus. Amen.

Look at this rope. Pretty long, isn't it, just to state the obvious. But for a moment, let's focus on this short, frayed end. It's not at all a big percentage of the length of the rope, is it? In fact, if you were to compare the length of this frayed end to the rest of the rope, you would probably say, "There is no comparison." Well, your life on earth is this small, short, frayed end. It doesn't compare with your eternity. Your temporary life on earth, doesn't compare to your eternal life in heaven. Yes, it can seem and feel like your whole life is just one frayed end. And those frays are real. But just think, compared to eternity, all of COVID fits into this tiny spot, plus every time that guy broke up with you, plus every time you lost your job, plus every time you were sick, plus all your anxiety and all your stress and all your sleepless nights and all your financial problems, plus, plus, plus. They all fit into this small, tiny, almost insignificant end. Your eternal life with Jesus, with no anxiety, or job loss, or stress or sickness or financial problems, is all this long, long length of rope. What's worth living for? The tiny end or the rope? What's worth dying for? The frayed end, or the rest of the rope?

What I mean, brothers and sisters, what a cool way to start, with these wonderful words of relationship. Brothers and sisters. The early Christians really attracted a lot of attention, in a good way, for calling each other brothers and sisters, showing even in this tiny section of the rope, they had a bond that couldn't be frayed.

Brothers and sisters, that what we are, the time is short. Like the strands of the rope are pulled together, so God has pulled things together to shorten the time of this earth. This word for time has a special meaning. It's not the passing of seconds or minutes, it's a fixed time, the right time, it's a special time. Sometimes the word time referred to a time of crisis or opportunity. And maybe those two words, "crisis," and, "opportunity," aren't that far apart. Has the crisis of 2020 been an opportunity to show us, "The time is short! The time on earth won't last forever!" How many times does the Lord use a crisis in finances as an opportunity to show us, "It's not worth it to live for the tiny end of the rope. Live for the rest of the rope."

A crisis in a marriage can be an opportunity. I know, I even pray it struck you as strange at first, when God's Word, God's own Word said, "Those who have wives should live as if they did not." What? Why write this? Some would say it's because a man named Paul wrote this and Paul was single, so he was clearly a chauvinist and a misogynist. But read the rest of this chapter in the Bible.

Seriously. Maybe not right now, but the rest of the chapter is about marriage. The wonderful blessing marriage is, the lifelong union marriage is. In fact, God himself loves marriage, elevates marriage, created marriage as a piece of paradise, not a piece of paper. So why seem to put down marriage? Because marriage is only for this earth. Even a marriage of 60 years fits into the tiny end of the rope. As great as marriage is in God's eyes, there's something even greater: God! As important a relationship as marriage is, our most important relationship is always with the Lord. Certainly a marriage to a Christian spouse can greatly help your relationship with the Lord. But no marriage to a person on earth can replace our marriage to Christ!

You know it was a struggle as I studied this part of the Bible to see Jesus right away in these verses. And I'm not sorry, but I can't preach a sermon without Jesus. But in some way, all the Bible points to Jesus. Jesus uses marriage as a picture of his close, lifelong relationship with each believer. And at the same time, Jesus elevates his marriage to each believer as even greater than a marriage that believer might have with a spouse on earth. How cool is that? Marriage a picture of our relationship with Jesus. But our marriage to Jesus even greater. Don't worry. It won't be the last time we get to see Jesus in these verses and it was actually fun to have to seek a little harder for Jesus, then the joy of finding him was greater.

So next on the list of things of this earth. Those who mourn as if they did not. Again, God is not saying, "Don't mourn. You can't be sad when someone dies." But here's what's so cool. Mourning the death of people we love is temporary. There will be no mourning in heaven. There will be no death in eternity with Jesus! Wow! Can you imagine that! No death! No mourning! For the long part of the rope! Even mourning now, we don't grieve like the rest of people who have no hope!

My brother got remarried a couple of years ago. His wife had some Christian background, but not a lot it seems. Before they got married, my brother shared his faith. My new sister-in-law took Bible 101 and was so excited the day she was confirmed. I have a cousin who is dying of cancer, in his mid 50s. My sister-in-law overhears my brother talking with my cousin. "Keith, you're going to be ok. You are going to be with Jesus through faith in him. After you see Jesus, say hi grandpa." Terri sees the notes and cards my mother writes to Keith, focusing on eternity with Jesus. Terri mentions, "You talk about death differently. Growing up, we were just sad and wore black for 30 days. But you talk about death differently." Brothers and sisters, the time is short. Talk about death differently. Death for the believer is about being with Jesus. Physical death is when I get to leave behind the frayed end of the rope and start enjoying the perfect, long part. Those who mourn, as if they did not.

Those who are happy as if they were not. Even the strongest human emotions, even the one thing so many people are seeking on

this earth: to be happy, that is so temporary, that time is so short. All your happiness on this earth fits into the tiny section of the rope. In fact, it's even interesting that Paul lists five things of this earth to show that the time is short. Five is half of the Bible's number of completeness. Is God trying to say, take all the things of this earth, marriage, mourning, happiness, buying, using stuff, they aren't even half of what you will have in heaven? They are just this much, compared to eternity.

Even buying. The word buying has the idea of people who frequent the market place. I would make some sarcastic comment about how women be shopping, but I won't. Those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep. We really aren't owners. We are renters, borrowing God's stuff for a short time while here on this earth. Things are a trust from God, not our possession. They are not ours to keep, but ours to share. They aren't really ever ours. All this stuff belongs to God.

Here's another Jesus discovery in these verses. This word "buy," God uses it other places, in this very book to the Bible to say, "God bought you!" Isn't that the greater buying? God bought you at the price of the blood of his perfect Son! You are more valuable to God than all the silver and gold in all the world. God wanted you! God bought you! In baptism, God applied the price he paid and bought you, bought you out of sin and bought you as his special possession. The things you buy, you can't keep, not for eternity. But the people God bought, with his blood, in your baptism, God gets to keep you. You are God's to keep for the long part of the rope. One more thing on the list. Those who use the things of this world, as if not engrossed in them. Wow! This hurts. Ever seen someone engrossed in a phone? Ever been that person? Might one of your children ever say, "I wish I were a cell phone. Then my dad would pay more attention to me." We can have things and use things. But things are temporary. Don't get engrossed in them. Don't use them to the highest degree as though that's all that matters. Use things, but treasure people. Not treasure things and use people. Use things for the good of people, not use people for the good of things.

For this world in its present form is passing away. Things are just constantly disappearing. How long did that phone last? How about that video game you had to have? That car that was so cool new and such a piece of junk later on? How long did your happiness last? Even a wonderful marriage? 50 years? 60? That all fits on the tiny, frayed end of the rope.

What's worth living for? What's really, really worth living for? How can I have forty-five hours a week to work for things, but not forty-five minutes to worship with my brothers and sisters, online or in person? How can I have five minutes every day to brush my teeth, which I can't take to heaven, but not five minutes a day to read my Bible and strengthen my relationship with Jesus that I will take to heaven? I think everyone would say, "You need to work at marriage. You need to invest in your marriage." Well, what about working at your relationship with Jesus, is that just going to happen? What about investing in your marriage with Christ? That one pays eternal dividends! Asking these questions of myself, really hurt. Giving the honest answers, hurt even worse.

But, brothers, don't worry. Sisters, don't stress. There's more Jesus here. The word form is used only one other place in the New Testament. It refers to Jesus. Jesus took the form of a servant. Jesus left the long part of the rope to come into our messy, frayed end. And Jesus served us with a perfect life. And he took that servant's form to be obedient to death, all the way to death on a cross. His death does not disappear. His empty tomb does not pass away. Heaven and earth may pass away, but God's Word will not pass away. Jesus bought you with his own blood. He married you for all eternity. Jesus, he's worth living for!

Let's ask again, "What's worth living for?" Is the goal of your life marriage, home, financial security? Or your marriage with Jesus, your home in heaven, your eternal security with your Savior? And even if your spouse, your house, all your money is taken away, does that take away Jesus? I was so thankful to study these verses and refocus and reprioritize. Was 2020 really that bad? Yes, there was death, but for believers that meant crossing to the long and perfect part of the rope. Even if you lost your house, you didn't lose your mansion in heaven. Even if you lost your job, you didn't lose Jesus. And I'm thankful to God for moving the hearts of his people so that I didn't lose my job, or house. Thank you. Even if you lost your health, for a time, you didn't lose eternal healing. Even if you lost social connections, you didn't lose you brothers and sisters in Jesus. Even if, you lost all of the above, it all fits on this part of the rope. Even if, it doesn't fray or change the rest of the rope, the perfect, the eternal, the heaven with Jesus. Amen.