

What would you do if you knew you had 40 days to live? This question is not totally without some foundation in our life because many of us have gone to the doctor's office and received news that turned out to be life transforming. Some have been told they have cancer, others that tumors are found. Still others have bad backs requiring surgery. There are reports requiring dialysis or a regular regimen of pills. These and other diagnosis truly make you stop and think about not only the quality of life but also the quantity of days. How many days do I have before the pain gets too great? How many more days do I have before I find myself limited?

When such news comes to our attention in the present we often discover that our minds will wander to our past. Back in the day we could drive without limitation or work those extra hours without too many problems, life was good or at least easier. Of course we could go back to our youth and remember the endless energy that we all used to own. Besides looking back to our past, we also think about our future. We wonder how we are going to cope with these new concerns. We might find ourselves becoming angry that we must deal with such issues or we might simply become numb.

But what if we were given exactly 40 days to live? Would we get busy living or get busy dying? Would you try to make the most of your 40 days or would you just wait for it to come? Some might say that when a doctor gives us an unhealthy diagnosis, we are in fact being given a second chance. I cannot tell you how many times I have ministered to people who knew they were going to die fairly soon, and who took that diagnosis as a wake up call. Such people mended broken relationships with family members or tried to do some things they always wanted to do but put off. I know of many souls who suddenly desired to hear the word of God, after receiving the not so good news from the doctors. Their hearts were now open and they saw life with a greater sense of hope.

There was a movie that came out several years ago with Jack Nicholson called THE BUCKET LIST. If you have not seen it, I encourage you to do so. In the movie two main characters discover they have a limited time to live and so they jot down on a list, all the things they want to do before they kick the bucket. I can still see them jumping out of an airplane, skydiving. They rode motorcycles on the Great Wall of China. climbed Mt. Everest. They drove a vintage Shelby Mustang and Dodge Challenger around the California Speedway. The movie shows us what life can be like when you get busy living, even in the face of death.

Years ago, I would have been like Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman. I would have had on my bucket list, take a trip to Hawaii. Take a Caribbean vacation. Go to the Grand Canyon and walk the trail. Downhill Ski in Switzerland. But you will see in this sermon, my Bucket List has changed. Let's look at today: The Ultimate Bucket List

I think most of us here, if we knew we only had so many days to live would make an effort to get busy living. But how? God has given us some terrible news. Our sinfulness has destroyed our relationship with him. That relationship better be fixed before we die or we face hell. What if God gave us only 40 days to get rid of our sin? Would we wait until the last day to get rid of it or would we seek to get rid of our sin just as soon as we became aware of how much God hates it? How would we get rid of it?

The answer to those questions depends on how terrible you view sin. Some Christians look at sin like a trash can that to them takes forever to fill but God looks at sin like a trash can that does not have to be full to stink. When my grandson Edison was here, and I throw his dirty diaper into the trash can in the kitchen, the trash can doesn't need to be full. One dirty diaper can stink up the whole trashcan. If it just sits there for days, we would have to fumigate the house!

Well, that is how God sees our sins. Just one sin, one dirty diaper, is enough to keep us from a relationship with God. Just one sin is enough to cast us eternally into the pit of despair. God's task therefore is to help us see just how much he hates sin and what he is willing to do to destroy it. I believe that is one reason why we have the opportunity to go back in time and look at Jonah and his encounter with Nineveh. Here we see not only an example of how much God hates sin but, what he is willing to do to those who joyously live for it as well as in it.

We meet the city of Nineveh. Our text describes it as "great," a "very important city." During that time in history, Nineveh was extremely important. It was a commercial center, a business center. The city was very large. People from all over the world came there to make money, to do what important people do.

But the city had spiritual problems. No one knew the true God. They thought they did. But the god they had created in their minds wasn't even close to the true God. The god in their minds wasn't very holy. He was laid back about sin. As long as you don't do anything real bad, God doesn't care. You can be greedy. You can be immoral. You can lead any lifestyle you want. The more alternative, the better. It's alright to sin. Just don't hurt anybody. Don't do anything extremely bad, and you'll be fine. God is laid back about sin.

Am I talking about Nineveh? Or am I talking about our society today? Sound similar, doesn't it? Our society today doesn't know the true God. And so most people have concocted a god in their minds, a god who is not very holy. It's OK for me to be greedy. It's OK for me to be immoral. It's OK for me to live any lifestyle I want, because God is laid back about sin. Do whatever makes you feel good, as long as you don't hurt anybody.

But the true God is absolutely, positively holy. He is not laid back about sin. He hates sin. And God is very black and white in his Word on what he considers to be sin. God says, "You are not pure enough," "You have been tainted by the world." Your morals have been eroded by the world. "I have had enough of you. I will destroy you."

What are we to do? We meet the true God in all his holiness. We see his righteous anger. What are we to do? The people of Nineveh repented. They realized that they were on the wrong track. They declared a fast. They stopped their pattern of sinning. They looked to God for forgiveness. And that is what we can do as well. To repent means to stop being fake. To stop pretending that sin is OK. To repent means to put all your cards on the table, to admit to God every failure, every shortcoming. To stop making excuses.

And then God surprises you with his compassion. Look what he did for Nineveh: "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened." Surprised the people of Nineveh with his compassion. He freely forgave them. He cancelled the punishment he had planned for them

Here we see a beautiful picture of the grace of God. He's much more merciful than people picture. Most people believe that God forgives, but only if you're nice. You have to earn God's forgiveness by being good. But look at what God does here. These people didn't earn God's forgiveness by groveling. All the groveling in the world could never make up for all the sins they had committed. God forgave them freely. He showed them undeserved love. Unearned love. Grace is what God showed the people of Nineveh.

Why would God do this? God forgave these people because of his Son, Jesus Christ. You see, God knew that his Son, Jesus, would come. And Jesus would do what these people of Nineveh could never do – he would live the perfect life. And then, Jesus would let himself be punished for the sins of Nineveh. That happened on the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, he was being punished for the sins of Nineveh. He was letting himself be destroyed, so that these

people wouldn't be destroyed. Jesus let himself feel God's righteous anger, so that these people wouldn't have to feel God's righteous anger. Because of Jesus, God declared the entire city of Nineveh "not guilty." They were completely forgiven. What amazing grace, amazing compassion, God shows Nineveh in these verses. BTW, this was the largest mass conversion in the history of the world.

This is the same compassion, same forgiveness, that God shows to you. You see, instead of destroying you for your sin, God forgives you. And this isn't the kind of forgiveness the world pictures –the world says that God forgives you only if you're nice. No! God forgives you freely! He doesn't make you earn it. He doesn't make you perform a list of good works to earn his forgiveness. God forgives you freely.

He does this because of what Jesus Christ has done for you. Jesus took upon himself all the sins you have committed in your life. Jesus even takes on that sinful heart that you have, that selfish, immoral heart that you're born with - Jesus takes that on himself. And he goes to the cross. And he lets God punish him, so that God doesn't have to punish you. Jesus lets God destroy him on the cross, so that God doesn't have to destroy you. Instead, God forgives you. He freely forgives you, declares you "not guilty" in his court of law.

40 more days until I kick the bucket. What would I do? I would take a trip to Grand Rapids Michigan, and sit down with my daughter and son-in-law, and grandsons, and tell them they need to slow down their fast paced lives and make time for worship on Sundays. I would make sure that they knew they were saved by grace thru faith in Jesus. I would give my wife comforting passages from the Bible to show her, that God would be there to strengthen and help her in the journey she would be now taking alone. I would make as many evangelism calls as possible, especially to some unchurched people I've known for 8 years, who still don't follow Jesus. Maybe, because I only have a few days to live, they might actually listen to me. And I would continue to serve you, showing you that faith in Jesus Christ really does help in your last days. No skydiving, motorcycling on the Great Wall, or climbing Mt. Everest for me. I've got a Savior, who has an overflowing bucket of activities lined up for me, where the high is forever, not just for the moment. Seeing Jesus face to face. Seeing my loved ones. No more tears. A body that never gets old. Feeling good 24/7. Serving Jesus with enjoyable activities. We have an eternal overflowing Bucket of Blessings awaiting us. Amen.