

# *The Big Question About Life*

*“I came that they might have life,  
and might have it abundantly”  
(John 10:10).*

Why did Jesus come to this world? His answer is given in this verse: He came that people might have abundant life.

An important question which can be applied to life is found in 1 Kings 20. A war was taking place between the northern kingdom of God’s people, Israel, and Syria. Syria seemed to be winning, and it appeared that nothing was ahead but defeat for Israel. Then a prophet came to King Ahab of Israel. He told the king, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Have you seen all this great multitude? Behold, I will deliver them into your hand today, and you shall know that I am the Lord’ ” (1 Kings 20:13). Ahab asked, “By whom?” The prophet answered, “Thus says the Lord, ‘By the young men of the rulers of the provinces.’ ” Ahab responded, “Who shall begin the battle?” and the prophet answered, “You!” (1 Kings 20:14).

Ahab asked the question, “Who shall begin the battle?” The question comes out differently in the several versions of the Bible. It is “Who shall command the battle?” or “Who shall order the battle?” But, in reality, each translation means the same. The prophet must have fixed his eyes upon wicked King Ahab and said, “You! You

shall command the battle.”

That same question comes to every person today who would try to live an abundant life. The first time away from home for an extended period, the college student learns that he must command the battle. A young man who is in the armed services and far from everyone whom he has ever known and loved sees that he has to command the battle. It is always that same answer: “You!”

This is not to say that every part of our lives is under our command, for much of what happens is outside of our control. We do not control the weather, the environment, or the actions of others.

Recently, while thinking of the beginning of the college term, I remembered a young man who was at David Lipscomb College at the same time I was. He had everything. He was handsome and brilliant. He had turned down a full scholarship to Yale University to come to small David Lipscomb College. He was an excellent speaker and won the Founder’s Day oratorical contest. I can see him now: the most handsome boy on campus walking with the prettiest girl down the hall in the old Burton building. The fact is, however, that he did not become one of the great preachers of our generation. One night not many years later, his beautiful young wife left

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him for another man. Though he taught, preached some, and did some good, he now has Alzheimer's disease and is in a nursing home. He is about my age, but for all purposes his life is over.

We cannot control everything about life. Not one of us would be so naive and so out of touch with reality that we would think that we could command every battle. But some things about life we can command, and to the extent that we do, we will have abundant lives. "Who shall begin the battle?" said Ahab, and the answer the prophet gave was, "You."

### **Our Clocks**

We can command the clock. I do not mean, of course, that we can turn it back or in any way stop the movement of time. One of the strange things that Albert Einstein said that we do not understand was this: "If it were possible for man to get out into space and move at an incredible rate of speed, he would not age as rapidly." He meant that if an astronaut were hurdling through space in a spacecraft, moving at an incredible rate of speed, when he returned to the earth, he would not have aged as much as those of us who had remained on earth. We do not know whether or not this is true. We do know that while we stay on this earth we all age.

But we can control the clock to some extent. We can decide about how we will use our time—how many hours we will work and how many hours we will worry, how many hours we will pray, and how many hours we will play. We command this battle.

The word "time" appears 535 times in the King James Version of the Bible. For example, it says, "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep" (Romans 13:11); "Redeem the time because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16); "Remember how short my time is" (Psalms 89:47). How all of us need to resolve concerning our use of time today.

If one spends his time in foolish, hurtful pursuits, he will have a frustrating life. If he spends his time in completely selfish activities, life will be altogether unimportant.

On most Sunday mornings, I come to the building twice: once for an early morning

radio broadcast, a second time for class and worship. It is a rare Sunday morning when I do not see some men starting out on a sport activity—a boat or a golf cart may be behind his car. Aside from the fact that it is the Lord's Day, and it is a sin to forsake the assembly of God's people, I find myself wondering about the families of those men. How many of them have left wives to spend the day alone with the children? While the men selfishly spend time for themselves and have fun in the sun, the wives wrestle with the babies, prepare breakfast alone, get the children ready alone, go to worship alone, and have the afternoon to wile away the hours alone.

"Who shall command the battle?" asked Ahab. The answer was, "You shall command the battle." We can command our clocks.

### **Our Contacts**

We can command our contacts to an extent. We will decide the kind of people with whom we will associate. Ahab is pictured as the most wicked king of a thousand years. His wife was Jezebel, and the Scriptures say that she stirred up Ahab to do evil. A strange friendship developed during his life. No one understands how it came about. One can read the Bible a thousand times and, perhaps, never understand why these two people became friends. One was Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, who was a good man. The Bible says he sought the God of his father (2 Chronicles 17:4) and took great pride in the ways of the Lord (2 Chronicles 17:6). But early in his life he was going to fight Ramoth-gilead with Ahab, king of Israel. A prophet came to Jehoshaphat, after he had been with Ahab, and said to him, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? . . ." (2 Chronicles 19:2). That was a stout question that was put to Jehoshaphat, was it not? But somehow Jehoshaphat could not be turned back, and his friendship with Ahab seemed to have continued for a lifetime. When Ahab died, Jehoshaphat was with him at battle.

What was the outcome of all this? Jehoram, the son of good King Jehoshaphat, married Athaliah, the daughter of wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Athaliah so influenced

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Jehoshaphat's son that when he came to the throne after his father, the first thing he did was to kill his six brothers. The Bible says that when he died, "He departed with no one's regret" (2 Chronicles 21:20). He was so evil a man that when he died not one tear was shed over his death. Soon after Jehoram's death, Athaliah became queen. She reigned for eight years. Had it not been for the intervention of God in saving one child, she would have destroyed every male descendant of David.

How did all of that come to pass? A good man, Jehoshaphat, entered into a friendship with a very bad man, Ahab. He ruined his children, his family, and his nation.

God said, "I hate the assembly of evil-doers, and I will not sit with the wicked" (Psalms 26:5); "My eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me" (Psalms 101:6). We can decide whether or not the days and nights of our lives will be spent with those who, like Ahab and Jezebel, have no love for God.

### **Our Concepts**

We command our concepts, our thoughts: "As he [a man] thinks within himself, so he is" (Proverbs 23:7). The trouble with the world, of course, is the thoughts we think. When Paul in Romans 1 reasoned about what had happened to the Roman Empire, he said, "God gave them over to a depraved mind" (Romans 1:28). The thing that was wrong with the Roman Empire, he said, was that their thinking was confused.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul said, "In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving." Why do people not believe? The reason people do not believe is their thinking. The god of this world has blinded the mind.

I had the wonderful opportunity to see the remains and findings of King Tut's tomb in Egypt a few years ago. I remember the head-dress of King Tut. It is solid gold. Around the head are two objects: a cobra and a vulture. You would not expect to see a cobra and a vulture around a pharaoh's head. The reason for this decor is that the early Egyptian civilization knew, just as we know, that what de-

stroys a person is his thoughts. The idea was that the cobra would keep out evil thoughts before they got into the head of Pharaoh. The vulture would eat up any rotten thoughts before they got into the mind of Pharaoh. If we put garbage into our minds, then we will live a garbage-type life.

No one knows the answer to our garbage problem. Staten Island, just across from Manhattan, New York, is the world's largest garbage dump. Thousands of tons of garbage are brought every day into Staten Island. A five-hundred-foot mountain of garbage can be seen from a great distance. But even worse than the garbage that is being piled up in our streets and cities is the garbage of our minds. What we think about is what we are. If we think immoral thoughts, we will be immoral people; if we think depressing thoughts, we will be depressed people.

All of us were shocked by an atrocity that occurred at Warner Park in Nashville, Tennessee. A young lady was slain. The young lady was a graduate of David Lipscomb College and apparently a fine Christian girl. How a man could slay such a beautiful young Christian girl defies everything that is decent and good. The answer has to be in his thinking.

When someone drives around in an automobile thinking about sex, when someone thinks depressing thoughts about money, when one thinks about things that are low, mean, and cruel, he will surprise himself one of these days with the depths to which he can go.

### **Our Commitments**

We can command our commitments, the things to which we commit our lives—our time, our money, and our energy. It is so easy to go through life giving ourselves energetically to many causes that do not matter much.

In the middle 1800s Queen Victoria held in Hyde Park in London, England, what was called "The Works of Industry." It was a display. Steam had just been invented. Everywhere one looked in Hyde Park steam engines, steam shovels, steam cannons, and steam organs were on display. The machine that won first prize in that 1851 exhibit had seven

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thousand parts. It was driven by steam and had pulleys, bells, and whistles. But those who followed history said that no one ever found any use for the machine. Everyone marveled at it and everyone talked about it, but no one found any use for it.

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*Are you investing in  
something that will matter  
forever?*

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Life can be that way. I can give myself to everything that is happening in the world that is noisy. I can get all excited about everything happening in the community except the one thing that will matter forever. Paul said, "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father" (Ephesians 3:14). To what was Paul committed? What was this cause? It was the cause of Jesus Christ.

I can control my commitments in life, or I can omit that to which God is committed. I hope you are investing your life in more than houses, lands, and things that will drop like clods of dirt upon your dead body when you die. Are you investing in something that will matter forever?

A few years ago, a man from Tennessee died. He had some relatives, but he left his entire estate, \$270,000, to the federal government with instructions to pay it on our national debt. To be sure, we are concerned about the national debt, and we wonder what our great grandchildren are going to say about a generation of Americans who lived off their money the way we have done. Without being

unpatriotic, what must God think when we die and leave everything that we have to this world and not a nickel to the work for which Jesus died?

In contrast, a few years ago an explosion occurred in a store in San Jose, California. Elmer James, a member of the church of Christ, was injured in the accident. It was a tragic explosion that killed a number of people. Elmer James was broken in pieces. Both of his legs had compound fractures. His arms, ribs, and face were shattered like a broken mirror. Elmer had been wanting to start a new congregation in a growing part of San Jose. He had had no idea of how they were going to get the funds. When word came that he would get a considerable insurance claim, Elmer decided he would use the funds from the insurance to build the church building. Two days before the new meeting house was opened in San Jose, Elmer James passed into eternity.

It is all a matter of commitment. There are always ten thousand things to do, a thousand places to go, a thousand things calling for our money, a thousand things wanting our time, and a thousand things staking a claim upon our energy, but we control our commitments.

### **Conclusion**

If one would have an abundant life, he must command his clock, contacts, concepts, and commitments. If not, one will live a life that is totally out of control. We command the battle.

Do you want to give Jesus Christ the role of commander-in-chief? The power to command the battle is derived from the power of Jesus Christ. Any victories that we win are victories which come through the grace and strength of our Lord Jesus.

"If you wish to travel far and fast, travel light. Take off all your envies, jealousies, unforgiveness, selfishness, and fears."

—Glenn Clark