

Jesus teaches us how to wait for the coming of his kingdom. He says, “A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me.” At this time, Jesus was going to be taken away from his disciples, condemned, crucified, and buried. But on the third day he would rise from the dead, and they would see him again. A little while they would not see him, and again a little while they would see him. His death and resurrection remain the very foundation for the Christian life. We continue to live by this teaching of Jesus. It is his teaching of a little while. Our life on this earth is only a little while. To God the span of our life is like a breath. But our true and everlasting life is hidden in him with our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. We don’t live for ourselves. Instead, we live for him who died and rose as we look forward to his glorious return.

The death and resurrection of Jesus are the foundation for our life as Christians. Since we have been baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection, it follows that our entire life here on earth is one of dying and rising. Repenting of our sins with faith in God’s promise, the old sinful nature in us is crucified every day and our new man comes forth, alive in Christ Jesus. This is a daily dying and rising. And it shapes the way we see life here on earth. It shapes the way we see our duties. It shapes the way we see our stations in life. Your job as a father or a mother is only for a little while. Your children are a gift of God, whom he entrusts to you for a little while. Any kind of authority you carry out in this life is for a little while. Any kind of authority you submit to in this life is for a little while. Any afflictions you must bear, any temptations you must fight against, any sadness or happiness, honor or praise, enjoyment or disappointment – this is all for a little while. You look to something much greater. You look to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. He is coming soon.

Any duty you carry out in this life is a duty you know will only last for a little while. Of course, this doesn’t mean that your work is unimportant. No, in fact, this means that it is much more precious and meaningful than you could know. When you raise your children, you are not just feeding them, clothing them, and helping them to succeed in this life. Much more, you are commending them to him who died and rose to give them life. You are teaching them that nothing lasts forever except for the Word of their Savior. And when they are going through temptations, when they are being bullied, when they are suffering from a guilty conscience or a heavy sickness, you teach them that these things are only for a little while. You teach them to bear these pains for Christ’s sake, looking eagerly for his return.

When you put in your hours at work, you learn from Jesus that when he returns all the works of this world will burn up. But again, this doesn’t take value away from your work. Jesus isn’t teaching you that you shouldn’t even try because it’s going to break anyway. No, Jesus is teaching you to value the work he has given you while it is day before the night comes when no one can work. And he is teaching you that the value of your work is not in how long you can make it last. You can’t control that. The value isn’t found in how much bacon it puts on the table. Instead, the value of your work is found in love for God and your neighbor. Such love flows from faith and a good conscience. God is pleased with your work because it is done by faith in Christ who has made all things new. Let’s say you spend hours a day working on a building project, making sure that everything is sustainable and up to standard. The day after the construction is finished, Jesus returns. No one will live or work in your building. The whole earth is cleansed by fire while Jesus judges the living and the dead. Was your labor in vain? Was all your work on that building for nothing? To the world, this would seem to be the case. But a Christian doesn’t see it this way. A Christian knows the whole time that his labors are for a little while. God has prepared them for you. And if God tears it down then he has still blessed the work he has given to us.

When the children of Israel were traveling through the wilderness God had them set up the tabernacle. It was a huge project involving many workers. When God's glory cloud moved, they would tear down the tabernacle and follow God's glory until it rested in another location. Then they would build up the tabernacle again. Sometimes the tabernacle would stand for many days. Sometimes it would stand only a few days. But every time the glory of God moved, they would tear it down again, and when the glory of God rested they would build it up again. This is how God was teaching them to wait for his Salvation. It is through dying and rising, tearing down and building up, being humbled and being exalted.

God gives you your work to do in this life, because he loves you. He wants you to serve your neighbor and the living God. And as much as he himself has prepared these works for you to walk in, he also teaches you through these works that you cannot rely on them. Things break. Dreams shatter. Goals are often not met. Your body fails. Your kids get sick. Your sins get the better of you. These are all things you learn while you work. God is teaching you to die to yourself and to find your life in Christ. Because when he returns he will prove that your works were not in vain. As Isaiah says, you will build houses and live in them; you will plant vineyards and enjoy their fruit (Is 65:21). St. Paul therefore gives these encouraging words in 1 Corinthians: "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labors are not in vain. (1 Cor 15:58)"

St. Peter tells us to be subject, for the Lord's sake, to every human authority. He tells us to honor everyone. Honor everyone in the station God has given him. Honor the emperor. Honor the policeman. Honor your employer, and your teacher. Honor your father and your mother. This honor comes from knowing that all authority is given by God. Notice that Peter does not tell us to fear the earthly rulers. No, we are only to fear God. God has the authority to kill and make alive. He has the authority to condemn or free the soul, not just the body. He has given honor to various human authorities to serve a purpose for a little while here on earth. But this is only for a little while. So honor them. Pay your taxes. If you vote, think about protecting your neighbor. Think about the unborn and the dignity of marriage and the family. Think about the poor and your neighbor's livelihood. They will always be with you in this life. But this is only for a little while. Your true inheritance is not in this world. So whatever duty God has given you, do it in fear toward him, trusting that he will preserve you in the faith until you die.

And love your fellow believers. Peter literally says, "Love the brotherhood." This is what the church is. It's a brotherhood, brothers and sisters bearing one another's burdens, forgiving each other, covering up a multitude of sins. This is the life of the Christian church as we receive forgiveness, life, and salvation from the Lord Jesus himself. Such love, which flows from faith and a good conscience, is not only for a little while. To love your fellow Christians, to share with them the compassion your Lord has shown you, will last forever. This isn't because of how valuable or enduring your work is. It is because it flows from faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. Your best efforts will ultimately fail. But the love, which God has poured into your heart, which compels you to serve your neighbor, will prove on the last day that your faith in Jesus was true and genuine.

The world doesn't mourn over what Christians mourn over. Jesus tells his disciples that when they weep and lament the world will rejoice. While the disciples were weeping over their Lord, the Roman soldiers tortured and mocked him, and the Jewish leaders accused and taunted him. Christians are sad when God's Word is denied and attacked. Christians mourn when love for Jesus and his sheep grows cold.

The world can't mourn over these things. The world will mourn over natural disasters, death, injustices, and other outward evils. But this is not a sadness that leads to repentance and life. They might ask where the love is when they see people fighting and killing each other. But they can't find it in Jesus who gave his life up for them. So instead of seeking comfort and joy in the eternal Lord, they seek it in things that last for only a little while. They rejoice over the election of a new politician, the passage of a new law, the victory of their preferred party, or the rise of a new hero. And while we should certainly thank God when he gives us just and competent leaders, we know that these are only for a little while.

It doesn't always seem like a little while. The pain a mother goes through when she's giving birth seems like it will never end. The battle against your sinful desires, which wage war against your soul, rages on in this life. Your sadness over death or your pains of body and soul make your time slow. But Jesus calls it only a little while. It is by faith in Christ who has conquered death that you can call your afflictions light and momentary. As a new mother forgets her pain for the joy of her newborn child, the joy of the gospel overwhelms the sadness of this life.

Jesus says that no one can take this joy from you. It is joy in knowing that your Savior is risen from the dead and that you will see him face to face. And it is the joy in knowing that whatever work you have to do in this life was given to you by God. So even if it seems to be in vain, it can't be. God gave it to you. He counts every tear. He hears every prayer in Jesus' name.

Years ago, a very close friend of mine told me that his wife was pregnant. They were excited, especially since they had been waiting for God to bless with them a child for a few years. A month or two later he called me and told me that his wife miscarried. We talked about the fact that God gives, and God takes away. I then told my friend that though he couldn't see and hold his child, God had still made him a father, even if it was only for a little while. By making him a father, God gave him responsibilities. The first of these duties is to pray for your children. My friend had prayed for his unborn child from the moment he learned that his wife was pregnant. His wife was praying for her child within her. Were these prayers in vain? No, absolutely not. They were doing their duty when they prayed for their little one, a duty God himself gave them. And if God gives it, then it can't be a disappointment.

We do our duties while it is day. And sometimes the darkness comes before we expect it. But whether it's a long day or a short day, we are always blessed when we look to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Then, as Isaiah also says, no longer will an infant live only a few days (Is 65:20). God gives us times of sadness. He gives us our work. He gives us everything in this life. And he teaches us to look in hope for the joy that is set before us in Christ. In a little while we shall see him. Amen.