

Why do some die young?

To lose someone you love is always traumatic, but especially so when they die young. If you have come to this page because this is your experience, you have my deepest sympathies. There is little I can do except to mourn with you. Whether you will derive comfort from the observations made below I cannot say, but there may be a pointer here or there to engender hope.

The first thing to note is that death is one of the most certain facts of life. As the Bible puts it: “For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away.” When you are young, you get the feeling that life goes on more or less forever, but if, by the grace of God, you live long enough to become an old age pensioner, it is easy to wonder where so many years have gone. The Bible’s description of life is so accurate. Also, the older you get, the faster the years seem to fly.

As death is so universal, it is bound to touch us all to some degree. Sometimes it is expected, whether as the termination of a period of serious illness, or at the end of a long life when the mortal flesh becomes very frail. But you only have to pick up a local newspaper to read of many lives that have come to an abrupt and unforeseen end, often by a sudden health problem, physical accident or crime. If we are wise, we will prepare ourselves for the eventuality, not knowing when our earthly journey might be over.

Life is a precious gift. Problems arise if we approach life with unrealistic expectations. How simple it is to have the feeling that each person is entitled to a long life as some sort of right. This is to miss the point altogether. God made us, and we are here to

serve His purposes. When a lifetime on Earth is set alongside the span of eternity, however long the life, it is nothing more than a fleeting moment. The real substance of each person is their soul, which is so frequently neglected. In view of our sinful indifference to our Maker’s claims, we have absolutely no grounds for regarding our lives as our own, nor justification for any sort of life expectancy.

While it does not relate specifically to those who die young, we need to think about those left behind when someone greatly loved passes on into the next world. Grief can be overwhelming for some, and grieving is both natural and proper provided that it is not accompanied by despair. Despair is one of the heavier weapons in Satan’s armoury. He uses it to try to destroy Christian hope, which is another one of the precious gifts, like life itself, that we receive from God. If we fall victim to despair, repentance will be required to overcome it. Should a person feel that life is not worth living after the passing of one who was dearly loved, there is the possibility that love for a fellow human was being put before love for God. It isn’t right to make any person into an idol.

The very fact that the unhappy or grief-stricken person is still alive and continues to live clearly indicates that he or she still has a part to play in God’s plan, whether it be further opportunity to turn from self-pleasing to God-pleasing, or there is further work to be done for our Maker while here on Earth. Most people nowadays would offer the advice, “Think positively”, which is sound advice as far as it goes, but hopefully the points mentioned above in this and the preceding paragraph will be more helpful in directing thoughts into the right channel that leads to the best outcome.

Whether an earthly life be long or short, it will have accomplished its intended function by the time death occurs. It is not for us to judge whether any individual will go to Heaven or Hell. God will infallibly divide the sheep from the goats, dispensing His mercy and His wrath appropriately and in complete righteousness on the Day of Judgement. The length of each individual's earthly life will be absolutely immaterial. Whether it is a baby who lives for a minute or two, or Methuselah who lived to be nine hundred and sixty-nine years old, it will make not a scrap of difference. We can be certain that God will do whatever is right when we have to answer for the life we have lived here.

Did you raise your eyebrows at the great age of Methuselah? His is the oldest age mentioned in the Bible. Adam lived to be nine hundred and thirty, Noah nine hundred and fifty, but the average lifespan steadily decreases. Abraham only lived to be a hundred and seventy-five, Moses one hundred and twenty, and by the time the psalms were written, a lifetime was reckoned as "threescore years and ten." Has the Bible got its facts wrong? I'm sure it hasn't. It is really just what one would expect. The human genome was surely created perfect in Adam's case, and was not programmed for death. It has deteriorated by mutation since the entry of sin into the world, resulting in a shortening of lifespan. Modern science has extended life expectancy in more recent times, but a hundred is still a great age nowadays.

There is an account in the Bible of Methuselah's father, Enoch, whose earthly life only lasted for three hundred and sixty-five years when the lives of others reached more than eight or nine hundred. It might be suggested that he died young, but it is more likely that, like the prophet Elijah, he

hasn't died at all. Both walked with God, and were taken to be with God without seeing death.

I began this page by using the expression 'to lose someone'. It is a common phrase which may or may not be true. While death is properly feared by the faithless who have not repented, Christians are in the happy position of knowing that for them, the death of the body simply brings about a time of separation from the many they precede into the life to come. After the Last Judgement, they know that they will be reunited with their loved ones who also die being redeemed by the sacrificial death of Christ Jesus. The 'someone' mentioned will only be truly lost if either the mortal who died or those who grieve are ultimately banished from the presence of God. What a tragedy it would be if the one who died was very young and was welcomed into Heaven to everlasting life by virtue of incipient faith, while the person who loved neglected salvation so that the pair were separated for all eternity!

It also needs to be pointed out that while God's people will enjoy fellowship with all the inhabitants of that everlasting paradise which God has prepared for those who love Him, those who are consigned to Hell will not even be able to enjoy the company of those that are similarly bedevilled on account of the extreme torment that they will all be experiencing. 'Weeping', 'wailing' and 'gnashing of teeth' are words used by Jesus to describe the ultimate condition of those who are perverse or apathetic towards God and His kingdom.

One only has to think about the great tsunami of Boxing Day 2004 to realise that people of all ages – good, bad and indifferent – may suffer a totally unexpected end to life. Sadly, many of

these were undoubtedly caught unprepared to face their Maker.

Jesus referred to a disaster while here on Earth when He said to His listeners, "... those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, do you think that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No: but, except you repent, you shall all likewise perish."

Do you remember the man born blind whose story was told in the Gospel of John, chapter 9? At the beginning of the account we read, "His disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."

So there we have it in a nutshell. All things happen so that God's purposes for each of us are fulfilled. The age when we die just isn't relevant, and some die young. The uncertainty of life should make us all heed the words of the Bible which state, "behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." And salvation is so vital to each of us that we should heed the urgency of the call to repent, believe and be baptised. We might never have another opportunity to respond.