

# At the End of the Day

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2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Sunday, October 24, 2010

“At the end of the day” is an expression that I hear all the time. I’m not sure where it came from, but I get what it means. “At the end of the day” is the contemporary form of “when all is said and done,” or “when the dust settles,” or (perhaps) “come judgment day.” In that hour, as the old hymn goes, *we shall understand by and by*. All things will be made clear to us “at the end of the day.” Or, another way to put it is that “at the end of the day,” we will be able to look back and see – *really see* – what matters!

There was a wonderful movie a few years ago with Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson called *The Bucket List*. Do you remember it? The two men meet in a hospital and both have been told they have but a few months to live. Carter, the Morgan Freeman character, has dedicated his life to work and family, but never followed his own dream. Edward, the Jack Nicholson character, has done nothing but follow his own whims, and never brought anything but misery to others. They’re quite a pair! They decide to make a “bucket list” – a list of the ten most important things to do before they kick the bucket. Things like sky-diving, racing, mountain-climbing – and in Edward’s case, a chance to kiss the most beautiful girl in the world. So, they leave the hospital and off they go on their “bucket list” adventures until – much to their surprise! – they discover that the most important thing in the world *at the end of the day* has been right under their noses all along!

Towards the end of the movie, Carter muses with Edward about what it all means *at the end of the day*. He says that there are only two questions you get asked at the “Pearly Gates” when you kick the bucket. One is: *Have you found joy in your life?* The other is: *Has your life brought joy to anyone else?*

Two questions, one answer: *Yes*, or *No*. You can’t find joy without sharing it. You can’t give to others what you don’t have yourself. So, it’s *Yes*. Or *No*.

So this is a sermon about saying *Yes*. *Yes* is, at the end of the day, all *faith* is. Theology is merely a way of explaining *Yes*. Scripture is really just the memory of how *Yes* has happened before. Church is merely an organized way of helping everybody to *Yes*. Beautiful music, sacred spaces, moving words are just invitations to *Yes*. Even prayer is just a conversation with *Yes*. For *Yes* – at the end of the day! – is a choice only you can make.

Let me make a few observations about the surprising ways *Yes* turns up in our lives:

- Sometimes *Yes* begins with a *No*. Every hour a person in recovery says *No* to an addiction, is also an hour saying *Yes* to his or her life.
- Sometimes *Yes* begins with a *letting go*. An older person decides it's time to give up driving, and with driving some independence and control. But there's a dignity to letting go and choosing for yourself.
- Sometimes *Yes* gets said as *Good-bye*. It's time for a shift and new direction.
- Sometimes *Yes* gets said as *I'm not putting up with this!* That's when you know you've stumbled across a core value!
- Sometimes *Yes* starts with *I'm sorry*. That's when you realize you've gone too far.
- Sometimes *Yes* sounds like *Help!* That's when you remember you're not alone
- Sometimes *Yes* sounds like *Whoa! It's all so much bigger than I am!*
- Often *Yes* sounds like *Thank you*. Thank you in all things, at all times.

A friend of mine begins every day before she even gets out of bed inquiring of God where she might meet God that day. From then on, she says, everything is an invitation to *Yes* – *everything*.

Paul in the reading this morning gives us a wonderful example of *Yes*. The first part of the reading we so often use at funerals: *I have fought the good fight, I have run the race*. That's easy to understand. We would all like to feel – at the end of the day – as though we deserve our rest and reward. But Paul doesn't stop there. There is awe and wonder in his voice as he realizes that long *before the end of the day* – *in fact all along* – his Lord has said *Yes* to him, and Paul is free and at peace.

Can you hear the joy in Paul's voice when he says, *The Lord stood by me and gave me strength?*

There are a couple things Paul wants us to know. First, *free and at peace* are available to us no matter what the world throws at us. And, second, *free and at peace* are available any time, and not just at the end of the day!

You know, as I look back on my own life, I reflect that I have often made faith way too complicated. It's as though I had an inner scorecard and I was toting up wins and losses, hoping that at the end of the day, I would see faith win. Do you know what I mean? Do you know those conversations that go on in your head in the middle of the night? *This was good, that was bad. This was fair, that was not. This I deserved, that I did not. This the world did, this I did. This I got right, this I got wrong.* The truth is, though, that in those moments when I have had enough of toting up the scorecard and simply say *Yes* in any one of the ways I mentioned a moment ago, I hear a *Yes* back.

What does *Yes* back sound like? Once, many years ago, I heard *Yes* clear as a bell when, in a time of real doubt, I asked God whether God loved me. Something inside me said *Yes*. I think that *Yes* is why I became a pastor. I wanted to find out more about how God's *Yes* operates in the world. Since that time I have found the world often a hard and unforgiving place to say *Yes* in. But whenever I have said *Yes* – *Yes* even where I was afraid or felt inadequate – I have found, with Paul, that the Lord has “stood by me and given me strength.” That has been enough to do my work here in the church, to get past cancer and divorce into new life and adventures. And it's not even – so far as I know! – the end of my day yet.

The movie *The Bucket List* ends for Carter and Edward with the final item on the wish list: to kiss the most beautiful girl in the world. For Carter, the girl turns out to be his wife whom, in his own anger at all the *No*'s in his life, he had blamed and turned away from. Now Carter is ready to say *Yes*. For Edward, the old goat, the girl turns out to be a granddaughter he has never noticed. Much to Edward's surprise, the last and best item on his bucket list -- to kiss

the most beautiful girl in the world -- is the chance to kiss his granddaughter good night before she goes to sleep.

You and I may not be able to achieve all that is on our own bucket list. But God has a bucket list, too. What's in God's bucket list for us? *Free and at peace. The opportunity to have joy and give it.* And most of all, at the bottom of the bucket, the assurance that *God's Yes is waiting for us anytime we're ready!* Not "at the end of the day," you see. At the right time. And the right time is any time we're ready to say *Yes* to God.

Amen