

Life is Short

Leo Tolstoy, one of Russia's greatest authors, once penned the story of a young Russian farmer who inherited his father's small farm. He at once began dreaming about expanding his property. Shortly after that a well-dressed stranger visited with an offer which seemed too good to be true. The man promised to give him all the property he could walk around in a day. He merely had to return to the same spot from which he started, his father's grave, before the sun went down.

Seeing rich fields in the distance, the son left immediately, he did not take any provisions or even saying goodbye to his family. He thought he could cover six square miles before sunset, but then decided to make it nine miles, then twelve and finally fifteen. At noon he was halfway around his 15-mile circuit. Though hungry and exhausted his greed drove him on. A few minutes before the sun dipped below the horizon the boy arrived at his father's grave and died there.

The stranger smiled and said, "*I offered him all the land he could cover. Now you see what that is, six feet long by two feet wide, and I thought he would like to have the land close to his father's grave...*" With those words the stranger, whose name was Death, vanished.

Tolstoy's story reminds me of a thought-provoking parable Jesus told in Luke 12:16-21 about a wealthy farmer who enjoyed an incredible harvest and decided to build larger barns. After his expansion was complete he planned to eat, drink and be merry. However, God called him a fool because the man died that night. He was foolish, not because he was a bad businessman, but because He ignored the source of his blessings. He thought only of himself and ignored the fact that life is short.

I once read about a pastor who visited a farmer who had once been active in church. As the farmer became increasingly successful, he focused less and less on God. The pastor told the farmer he was missed each Sunday. The farmer explained he was so busy managing his farm he no longer had time for church.

At the end of the visit the pastor asked if he could pray. When the farmer agreed, the pastor prayed, "*God you've heard it from John himself, if you take away the blessings you've given him he thinks he'll once again have time to pursue his relationship with You.*" The wealthy farmer got the bold pastor's point.

I have enough experience as a pastor to know that attending church does not automatically make anyone right with God. Church is, however, often used by God to help us keep our spiritual priorities straight in a world where it is easy to lose sight of what matters. The reality is that life is short, eternity is forever and if we are wise we will live accordingly.