

THIS IS THE MARK OF CHRISTIANITY – however much a man toils, and however many righteousnesses he performs, to feel that he has done nothing, and in fasting to say, “This is not fasting,” and in praying, “This is not prayer,” and in perseverance at prayer, “I have shown no perseverance; I am only just beginning to practise and to take pains”; and even if he is righteous before God, he should say, “I am not righteous, not I; I do not take pains, but only make a beginning every day.” He should every day have the hope and the joy and the expectation of the coming kingdom and deliverance, and to say, “If today I have not been delivered, I shall tomorrow.” As the man who plants a vine has the joy and the hope in himself, before ever he embarks upon the toil, and sketches out vineyards in his mind, and reckons up the income, when there has been no wine yet, and so enters upon the toil – for the hope and expectation make him labour cheerfully, and for the time being he incurs many expenses out of pocket; and in like manner the man who builds a house, and the man who tills a field, are at much expense to themselves first, in hope of the advantage to come; so it is here. If a man does not keep before his eyes the joy and the hope, “I shall find deliverance and life,” he cannot endure the afflictions, or the burden, and adopt the narrow way. It is the presence of hope and joy that make him labour and endure the afflictions.

St Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies*, A.J. Mason,
Homily XXVI, §11, p. 190

THE WHOLE LIFE OF MAN is very short, measured by the ages to come, wherefore all our time is nothing compared with eternal life. And in the world everything is sold at its price, and a man exchanges one equivalent for another; but the promise of eternal life is bought for a trifle.

For it is written, *The days of our life in them are threescore years and ten, but if they are in strength, fourscore years, and what is more than these is labor and sorrow.* Whenever, therefore, we live full fourscore years, or even a hundred in the ascetical discipline, not for a hundred years only shall we reign, but instead of a hundred we shall reign for ever and ever.

And though we fought on earth, we shall not receive our inheritance on earth, but we have the promises in heaven; and having put off the body which is corrupt, we shall receive it incorrupt.

Life of St Anthony the Great, by St Athanasius the Great, §16
Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume IV, p. 200