

WHY GO TO PIECES OVER LIFE

Matt. 6:33-34

Introduction:

1. The other day my attention was attracted to a squirrel busily gathering acorns on the ground as they fell from the trees. In the irony of life it appeared that the acorns seemed to have little value to the oak tree. It seemed to be just that the tree was providing food for the squirrel for the days of winter ahead.
2. Where we lived before, our house had a large holly tree loaded with red berries. Are the red berries produced for the tree or for others? They are attractive to the human eye but they surely must have some practical value. The birds during the fall were busy in this tree hungrily consuming the red berries. The thought occurred to me as it did in terms of the acorns that it is God's means of providing for His own.
3. A Pastor once wrote: "Said the robin to the sparrow,
I should really like to know
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so.
Said the sparrow to the robin,
I think that it must be
They have no Heavenly Father
Such as cared for you and me".
4. Now this is a simple little poem, but it carries a tremendous lesson for all of us. In effect, it is what Jesus was saying in His words recorded in Matt. 6:26, "Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet you heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"
5. In order to catch the meaning of these words we must see them in their context. They are a part of the Sermon on the Mount, which was delivered primarily to Christians. There, our Lord takes note of the fact that even Christian people are subject to worry or being overly anxious about many things. And while worry is bad for anyone, it is especially so for those who have trusted their hearts to God in Christ. While at the same time they do not trust the affairs of daily life to Him.

Thus in a sense, worry for the Christian is an insult to God. For it says that God is neither good nor great enough to see you through life's problems.

Divided Loyalties

The point at issue here is the Christian's divided loyalty toward God and material things. In Matthew 6:23, Jesus speaks of one's eye being evil. Actually it is an eye with double vision. It seeks to focus upon both heavenly and worldly values so that one sees neither clearly. Therefore one's life is filled with darkness.

With the passing of years we become concerned about our eyesight. Things can grow fuzzy – we can see double – or become nearsighted or farsighted. What we want is to see clearly – with things in proper focus – both near and far, having bifocal vision. We want a proper balance for all things.

In Verse 24, Jesus says that you cannot be a slave to both God and mammon. Each demands absolute loyalty. And you cannot give such to both. Therefore you live a divided life. When Jesus said, "Take no thought" concerning food and clothing, He was not teaching irresponsibility. The verb rendered "Take no thought" means to be divided in mind or to be overly anxious about these material things. Your real life is more than food and clothing or any other material thing, be it necessity or luxury. It was against this background that Jesus used the illustration of the fowls of the air. And because multitudes have not heeded this simple lesson, they see their lives going to pieces. In a society of affluence we see more people suffering from mental and nervous troubles than ever before in history. In a land of material plenty, multitudes are in a far country of spiritual want. So Jesus' words spoken long ago speak to the present hour.

But before we can understand what Jesus said, we must understand what he did not say. He did not say that we should have no wholesome concern about the future. He said we should not worry or fret about today or tomorrow.

Someone noted the difference between worry and concern. A worried person sees a problem. A concerned one solves it. Neither did Jesus say that we should not work. To the contrary, He said we should work and not worry. Worry is like rocking in a rocking chair. It gives us something to do, but it gets us nowhere. It takes just as much time to worry as to work, but work pays better dividends. Indeed, work is a good cure for worry. As we occupy our hands and minds in worthwhile responsibilities, we have no time or disposition for worry.

Jesus did not say that birds do not work. They neither plant nor gather harvests, but they are busy all the daylong. It has been noted that a sparrow works harder than anyone to make a living. Some birds, I am told, must eat more food every day than the weight of their bodies. But you never see one just moping. It is pecking and scratching for food the greater part of the day. And when it is not eating, it is singing, not complaining. In a sense, a bird trusts the heavenly Father to provide. But it searches out the provision. Someone said that God is going to feed every little bird, but He is not going to put it in its mouth.

Jesus said that a person is much better than a bird. God will provide, but even man must peck and scratch for a living. Worry will not take the place of work. The world does not owe you a living any more than it owes it to a bird. But it is there for the taking. Work will build your body and fill your stomach. Worry will destroy your body and leave your soul empty.

The futility of worry is expressed in Jesus' question: "Which of you by taking thought (worrying or dividing your mind) can add one cubit unto your stature"? (v. 27). Now the word, "stature" may mean height or length of life. A cubit is 18 inches. It is hardly likely that a man would want to add that much to his height. So the context here seems to call for length of life. By worry you cannot lengthen your life by the smallest of time. To the contrary, you may shorten it. Someone said that more people die from worry than from work, because more people worry.

The famous physician, Dr. Charles Mayo, points out "worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands, the whole nervous system, and profoundly affects the health". Said he, "I have never known a man who died from overwork, but many who died from worry and anxiety."

II. Live in Faith

So what Jesus actually is saying is that instead of fretting and worrying about life, we should live in Faith with our lives in the center of God's will. Regardless of what is happening about you, just remember that God is in control. God does not cause every adverse circumstance, but none happens apart from His knowledge. And He is guiding the events of history so as to accomplish His benevolent purposes.

In Matthew 10:29-31, Jesus sounded this note again. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing (penny)? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father's knowledge. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows".

Surely then you can trust Him to care for you. In a similar vein one writer reminds us that “every blade of grass in the field is measured: the green cups and the colored crowns of every flower are curiously counted; the stars of the firmament wheel in cunningly calculated orbits; even the stars have their laws”. And the God of the natural and cosmic orders is equally concerned about His children. So if God does not worry, why should you?

Most of our worry is about things that never happen anyway. In essence, worry is a figment of our imagination. It is over something which cannot harm us, but which may cause us to harm ourselves. As the sun is setting on the western horizon, a small thing can cast a big shadow. Likewise, if our Faith wavers, little things in life can cast long shadows that throw us into a panic. The reverse is equally true, when the sun is directly over us; even large objects make small shadows.

If our faith remains constant on God’s sure and steady hand, we can see things in their right perspective. Someone expressed it well when he said, “The eagle that soars in the upper air does not worry as to how it is to cross rivers”.

III. Ways to Overcome

In concluding this discussion, Jesus gives us two ways to overcome anxiety and worry. In Matt. 6:33 he says, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all things will be added unto you”. Since His hearers were already in the Kingdom, this seeking must be to bringing it into the heart of others. Rather than your first priority being material things, give yourself unreservedly to sharing God’s Kingdom and its righteousness with others. This means to do God’s will in everything. Dr. T. B. Maston said, “Life is too short to do anything less than the will of God”! It was Jesus’ contention, illustrated in His own life that worry will disappear when we allow God to become the dominating power in our lives.

Again, in verse 34, He said, “Take therefore no thought (do not be divided in mind) for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof”.

There are two days about which you should not worry: yesterday and tomorrow. Yesterday is gone forever into the record of history. You cannot change it. Turn it over to the Lord and stop worrying about it. Tomorrow has not yet emerged from the womb of time. You cannot therefore yet grapple with its problems, so do not borrow trouble from tomorrow. When it becomes today, then seize its challenges as opportunities and privileges.

Conclusion:

In essence, Jesus is saying that you have all you can do living today at its fullest. Live for today. For that is all the time there is. Let each task well done be a stepping stone to the greater challenges which beckon you. Do your best for the Lord regardless of the circumstance. And never look back with regret. Determine to do better next time. And when each day is done, do not fret upon your pillow throughout the night. It will only rob you of strength of body and spirit needed for tomorrow's responsibilities.

Having done your best today, at nightfall lie down to rest. Shut your eyes and mind to the demons of doubt, fear and worry. Go to sleep! God is awake, alive and very much at work in our world, for He does not slumber or sleep.

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