

BE NOT ANXIOUS FOR YOUR LIFE

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on January 31, 1965 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

I am amazed at the timeliness of the teachings of Jesus. Over and over through the years I have been impressed with the marvelous way in which his ancient messages meet our modern needs. I have been impressed with the way his teachings never become obsolete or out-of-date. I have also been impressed by the fact that he never taught anything that was not important. Although nineteen centuries have passed since Jesus lived upon the earth nothing he ever said has proved to be unimportant or insignificant, but rather his messages continue to have relevancy to the problems of the modern world. Today's study is a demonstration of all of these aspects of Jesus' teaching.

Notice with me the Lord's teachings as recorded in Luke 12:22-34, "And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. For the life is more than the food, and the body than the raiment. Consider the ravens, that they sow not, neither reap; which have no store-chamber, nor barn; and God feedeth them: of how much more value are ye than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a cubit unto the measure of his life? If then ye are not able to do even that which is least, why are ye anxious concerning the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin; yet I say unto you, Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass in the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more shall he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek ye not what ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: but your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. Yet seek ye his kingdom, and these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that which ye have, and give alms; make for yourselves purses which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief draweth near, neither moth destroyeth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

The Problem Seems To Be Growing

The problem of anxiety or worry seems to be growing in our day. It is one of the greatest problems of our modern world. One out of every two hospital beds in America is occupied by someone who is mentally ill. Of course, I fully understand that mental illness is a very complicated thing. There are many factors, and many causes, but one of the chief causes is worry which results from feelings of insecurity. In addition to those who are hospitalized, there are a great many others who are nervously upset, at least at times. Further, practically all people are less happy than God intended for them to be. In our text today, Christ spoke a significant word concerning this growing, deeply significant problem.

Man's Search for Security

From time immemorial mankind has sought security. One of the most widely used approaches is that to which our Lord referred when he told this story, "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he reasoned within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have not where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry. But God said unto him, Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee; and the things which thou hast prepared, whose shall they be? So is he that layeth up treasures for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:16-21).

This rich farmer sought security by amassing an abundance of possessions. He felt that if he could store up enough grain and goods that he could laugh at the time to come. There are literally millions of people throughout the world who are still trying this method. There is a deceptive feeling of security which comes with the ownership and control of significant amounts of the world's goods. But, it doesn't work. There is a very simple reason why it does not work. Death comes. Death sometimes comes suddenly, and unexpectedly, and sometimes slowly and painfully. But whether it comes slowly or gradually, it comes relentlessly. No one is able to escape it, no matter what he may own or control. There is no way for man to prepare himself against major disease and ultimate death. The rich grow old and die, just as do the poor.

There is also a second fallacy in this connection. Often, man does not possess things so much as things possess him. Possessions often add to one's anxiety, rather than remove the burdens of worry. The man who possesses much usually takes on an unusual measure of responsibility with its attendant problems. Many a man who has been unusually successful in acquiring this world's goods finds himself longing for the simple life with its consequent greater freedom from pressure.

Our Central Text

Immediately after telling the story of the rich, foolish farmer, Jesus then presented the words of our text today. "And he said unto his disciples, therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on." (Luke

12:22). The teachings of Christ are not against work and industry, but against worry. If we had a blackboard at hand I would write the words, "Be anxious" at one side. Then, I would write at the opposite side, "Work and pray." These are opposite approaches to life. One is Christian; the other is not. God expects his followers to be diligent, to be industrious, to be thrifty, to be foresighted, and to work hard. He does not want them to worry. The Christian point of view is simply that man will do his best at whatever constructive, wholesome work he sets his hand, and then he will leave the results to the Lord. Briefly stated, "It is work and pray."

It is plain from the teachings of Paul that God intends for his people to work. In I Thess. 3:10, the apostle wrote, "If any will not work, neither let him eat." To Timothy, he added, "But if any provideth not for his own, and specially for his own household, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever." (I Tim. 5:8). Christianity holds no brief for idleness, but teaches that man ought to work in order that he need not worry.

When we strip away the leaves and see the bare outline of the tree, we discover that our Lord's logic in this passage is very simple but also full of power. For example, in verse 23 he says, "For the life is more than the food, and the body than the raiment." Simply stated, his argument is that if God can provide life, the greater more difficult act, then surely he can provide opportunities for feeding, clothing, and sheltering that which he had created. It is much like saying that if a parent gives to his child an electric train, surely the child can trust him to provide the electricity to run it.

#### No Need--No Value

Verse 24 of our text reads, "Consider the ravens, that they sow not, neither reap; which have no store-chamber nor barn; and God feedeth them: of how much more value are ye than the birds!" The argument is pressed further in verses 27 and 28, "Consider the lilies (by which he simply means flowers of all kinds), how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass in the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven! how much more shall he clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

God provides for the ravens or birds; God provides for the lilies or flowers of the field. If God provides for these lesser works of his creation, surely he will provide for man, the crowning work of his creation. Notice also that the birds of the heavens and the flowers of the field are neither idle nor anxious. The birds are very active in foraging about to get their food, but they do not worry. The flowers likewise are very active in drawing moisture and food from the soil, but they do not worry. The argument that our Lord is making with these two examples is that worry and anxiety are not necessary. Our Lord loves us and will provide for us, so we need not be anxious.

His next argument is that anxiety does no good. Verses 25 and 26 press home this point. "And which of you by being anxious can add a cubit unto the measure of his life? If then ye are not able to do even that which is least, why are ye anxious concerning the rest?" The Greek word that is translated "measure" in this passage is also capable of being translated "stature" and also "span of life." The argument is simple: worry cannot make a man even an inch taller, nor can it add one hour to the length of his life.

Actually worry shortens life rather than prolongs it. Worry hinders a man physically rather than enhances his physical size or ability to perform. It takes a calm, confident temperament to become an Olympic champion. Through the years many have come to talk with me of problems which they face. Whether it be a girl anxiously concerned about the affairs of the heart, or a boy who is worrying about the decision of a life work or vocation, or whether it be a student worrisomely concerned over an examination, the truth of the matter is that in every case anxiety hinders rather than helps. Our Lord is saying simply that worry does no good.

Verses 29-31 bring this point to its climax. "And seek not ye what ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all of these things do the nations of the world seek after: but your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. Yet seek ye his kingdom, and these things shall be added unto you." Christians do not need to worry, because they have a Father in heaven who will provide. This is the same message found in the writings of the apostle Peter, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you." (I Pet. 5:6-7). This is truly a wonderful sentence to hold in the fore-front of our minds, "Cast all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you."

#### The Secret of Overcoming Anxiety

The secret of overcoming anxiety lies largely in the centering of one's heart upon the right thing. Continuing to read our text, in verses 32-34, we find Jesus saying, "Fear not little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that which ye have, and give alms; make for yourselves purses which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief draweth near, neither moth destroyeth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Our Lord never commands his followers to do something without showing them the means of achieving the command. In this instance he is simply saying, "Don't worry, and here is how to do it. Make God's kingdom first in your life."

As long as man's main concern in life is material--body, food, clothes, houses, possessions--he is in an uncertain, precarious situation. There is no other way than the way of anxiety and worry, because the things in which his life is centered are so impermanent and changing. However, the moment that he makes God and his kingdom--the spiritual realities--central in his life worry and anxiety begin

to fade away. When the spiritual becomes dominant in his thinking, he finds that he is no longer burdened by the uncertainties of the material things of this life.

How can we make this clear? Perhaps by imagining a conversation with the apostle Paul, who is so well known to all of us through his writings and the many accounts of his life which we have in the New Testament. Let us imagine that we stop the apostle Paul on the street and ask, "Are you worried about food? About clothing? About a place to live?" At first he looks a bit puzzled that we should even ask such a question, then he responds, "No. No. I hadn't really thought much about them." The whole emphasis of his life is away from concern over the material. The only anxiety mentioned in his life, after he became one of God's messengers, is that found in II Cor. 11:28 where we read his statement, "There is that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches." His concern was only for the spiritual welfare of Christians and for the salvation of men's souls. How free he had become from the petty worries and anxieties that plague the human race.

At another time Paul wrote to the Romans, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Rom. 8:31, 35, 37). Our lives are made secure not by things, but by triumph over things. Truly this was the accomplishment of the apostle Paul.

### Conclusion

In the midst of a materialistic, anxious, worrying age, we Christians need to lift our eyes to the things that are eternal, lest we be overwhelmed by the insecurities and uncertainties of the world. May we take as our life motto the word of our Lord, "Seek ye his kingdom, and these things shall be added unto you."

As we have examined the Lord's way, it becomes obvious that his is the only way to live and be happy in this world. Surely this is encouragement enough to lead a man to want to be a Christian. The way is simple. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart. Repent of your past sins. Confess the name of Jesus before men. Then, be buried with your Lord in the waters of baptism in order that you may be raised to walk in a new kind of life. As a Christian, then live the free and happy life of one who belongs to the Lord and who is on a journey toward a wonderful world in which there are no worries and no anxieties.