



STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, November 15, 2009

“Chase the Wind or Put First Things First” ENOUGH: Discovering Joy Through Simplicity and Generosity, Week 4 of 4

Matthew 6:25-34 — The Word from the Bible (Today's New International Version)

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Simplicity (from the Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible)

Simplicity is a quality of being plain, uncompounded and free from adornment or duplicity. In a moral sense, *simplicitas* is used in Latin literature to express such qualities as plainness, openness, directness and naturalness. The most prominent motifs related to simplicity in the Bible are: (a) plain openness, which is free from the complications of sophistication or duplicity; (b) moral uprightness and integrity of heart; (c) purity and loyalty in devotion to God, Christ or one's fellow man; and (d) liberality which springs from simple goodness and willingness to give of the self without reservation.

In the New Testament, the primary word for “simplicity” characteristically designates an undivided loyalty, purity in devotion as to Christ; but the term can also mean “wholeness of heart” in the sense of “generosity” or “liberality.” Slaves are exhorted to be obedient to their earthly masters *“in singleness of heart, as to Christ,”* and this exhortation is further explained as *“doing the will of God from the heart,”* and *“rendering service with a good will as to the Lord”* (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22). In II Corinthians 11:3, simplicity is characterized as an attitude of sincerity in devotion to Christ.

The Greek also suggests a quality of whole-heartedness, willingness to give of the self without reservation. Paul uses the term four times where the context demands the translation “generosity” or “liberality” (Rom. 12:8; II Corinthians 8:2; 9:11, 13; James 1:5).

Matthew 6:25-34

This passage about anxiety over possessions is introduced by the phrase, *“one cannot serve God and wealth.”* The point here is not that possessing wealth and serving God are incompatible, but that serving one's possessions cannot coexist with the service of God.

Jesus then shifts to the issue of anxiety and worry over having enough. At first, it seems that the subject of choosing between serving wealth or serving God is different than the issue of anxiety. The real question is not whether wealth and God can coexist, but which will be the priority in one's life. Jesus is continually struggling with those who depend on their own ability to care for themselves. Such reliance on self leads to selfish ambition where the needs of others and devotion to God as pushed to the side.

The message of these words is clear: If God has given us life; God will surely provide the means for sustaining that life. We can therefore be free from anxiety when we live in total dependence upon God.

Only those outside the people of God would give way to such foolish anxieties, since God knows fully our need. The aim of life is to “seek” God's Kingdom. God will provide for all our needs, just as he will fulfill the promise of the kingdom in his own way and time.

Psalms 46

The God who dwells on Mt. Zion is a sure defense for the people, even in the catastrophic events of the end of the world. God takes care of God's own. In verses 1-3 the chaotic waters of the underworld break forth, shaking and submerging the mountains and overwhelming the earth. These verses describe when the earth will return to the pre-creation chaos of Genesis 1.

God is our refuge even in the midst of this chaos protecting God's city Jerusalem and providing quiet and security. There is a river of life and health flows from the God's temple that will provide for God's people. At the end of the age the heathen will rage against the Holy City, but the sight of its God-given majesty makes them reel. At the sound of the Lord's voice, the earth melts.

The last three verses is an invitation to Israel. All God's people are to "behold" the result of these terrible events with the knowledge that God is our "refuge". The earth is covered with broken and burned weapons of war. God's eternal reign of peace has begun. The goal to which history moves is universal knowledge of God and the submission of all to him.

God speaks to the people in verse 10, "**Be still and know that I am God.**" For God's people there is nothing we need to do in times of trouble. We are simply to "be still" and let God be God.

Sermon Focus

Both Psalm 46 and Matthew 6:25-34 deal with our devotion to God and God's faithful care of God's people. This theme of constant devotion through all of life's challenges is woven into the core of the Biblical message from Genesis to Revelation. God's care is not limited by circumstances or resources. We have no reason to fear or worry, because God has created us for a purpose and a future. Therefore, we are called only to find that purpose and future by putting God first in all things.

Appointments, activities, assignments, demands, decisions, deadlines, schedules, services, seminars, plans, programs and people – these are all well and good, but where does God fit? As faithful follower of Jesus Christ, simplicity is more than just setting better boundaries, saying no, or cutting out activities. Simplicity is a matter of setting the right priorities. Who is the master of our soul?

An empty life is an empty life, no matter how busy we are. Jesus said, "**Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you.**" Charles Swindoll said it this way, "Much of our activity these days is nothing more than a cheap anesthetic to deaden the pain of an empty life."

Thoughts to Consider

- Talk to a friend or your family (spouse and children) and ask them this question: Am I too busy, rushing about, involved in too many activities? If they say "yes," then talk further on what you should eliminate from your life. Then do it!
- Go back to a friend you've offended by never writing to or visiting with, etc. Apologize and let them know you're trying to give people more of a priority in life than projects or activities.

Prayer Focus

Trietsch is a praying church. This morning, as you worship, one of our prayer volunteers is praying for everyone in each section of our worship center. We believe that prayer changes lives and hearts for good and for God.

We invite you to join these volunteers by praying for those persons around you. We believe these prayers will have an immediate impact on those for whom you are praying.

Remember... someone is praying for you. Here are a few prayers to guide you.

John Wesley's Covenant Prayer (1870)

(As we make our commitments to God this day, use this prayer as your focus. Remember... this is not just a financial commitment, but a five-fold promise of prayer, presence, gifts, service and witness. What are your priorities in life? Who is the master of your soul?)

***I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.***

Daily Readings

For the past three weeks, we have looked at the five-fold promise we make when we join the church. The first Sunday, we dealt with our spiritual life together through prayer and worship. The second Sunday, we dealt with our promise to serve God through our time in the church and community. Last week, we looked at our promise to uphold the church with our financial gifts. Today, we look at the call to share the message of Christ with others through word and deed. In addition, at the end of our service, we bring our five-fold promise to the altar – to uphold the church with prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness. These Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.

Monday, November 16 – Read Acts 8:26-40. Luke tells us the story of Phillip witnessing to the Ethiopian eunuch. This story is important to the early church in that the spirit of God guides Phillip through the entire process. Similarly, we are not alone when we share with others. Whether we are sharing our faith story or just inviting someone to church, we can depend on God to lead us. Who are the persons God has placed in your path? Can you trust God to lead you?

Tuesday, November 17 – Read John 21:1-19. In this resurrection appearance of Jesus, the disciples have gone back to fishing. Jesus finds them on the Sea of Galilee and has a life changing conversation with Peter. Basically, Jesus says to Peter, ***“If you love me, then feed my sheep.”*** Much of what people outside the church know about Christianity is how they see us act. When people see you, do they see Christ? What are you doing to say I love you to Jesus?

Wednesday, November 18 – Read II Corinthians 5:16-21. This is a short passage of scripture, but it is full of instruction. Included is the promise of a new life and the call to be an ambassador for Christ. We are Christ’s ambassadors – his emissaries. God makes his appeal through us. Are there specific people God has appointed you to be his ambassadors – people that perhaps no other Christian might influence in quite the same way you can? Take a moment to name two or three people who you care about that God may have appointed you to serve as his ambassador. Pray for them, and write down one or two specific things you will do to share Christ with them.

Thursday, November 19 – Read Matthew 5:13-16. This is another short but powerful scripture passage. Jesus reminds us that we are seasoning and the light to which others look for guidance. Spend a moment today listing those persons who look to you for guidance and leadership. What do they see in you? What is your witness to them?

Friday, November 20 – Read Matthew 7:21-29. Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount with a story about a wise and a foolish man. The wise man built his house on rock with a good foundation that would withstand the strain of weather and time. The foolish man built his house on the sand, which was not able to withstand even the first hard rain. Go back and read the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7 in Matthew). Have you built your life on the rock or the sand? What do others see in you?