

ANXIOUS AND TROUBLED ABOUT MANY THINGS

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on March 5, 1967 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P. M.

Recently in one of my classes while studying the life of Christ we came to the passage describing Jesus' visit in the home of Martha and Mary at Bethany. I was impressed again with the timeliness of the message for our generation, and especially noticed the phrase "anxious and troubled about many things." The entire passage, as we find it in Luke 38:42 reads, "Now as they went on their way, he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving; and she came up to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister did leave me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. But the Lord answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: for Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Obviously, Jesus was contrasting the importance of spiritual things with the unimportance of physical things. We can almost see Martha as she was busily concerned in the kitchen about the meal, about the silver, about the dishes, and about all of the other matters that go with entertaining. She had undoubtedly been quite concerned that the house was freshly cleaned and properly decorated. In effect, Jesus was saying, "Martha, why don't you forget about all those relatively unimportant matters and come sit down with Mary. Let me give to you the spiritual food that is so much more important."

After studying this text in class I decided that it would be appropriate for a forthcoming sermon. Just about that time I heard a speaker on national television quote Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous line, "Things are in the saddle and are riding mankind." This was quite impressive to me, and especially so since Emerson lived from 1803 until 1882. Necessarily, he made his comment almost a century ago. If in the day before the automobile, before the thousand-and-one labor-saving gadgets of our day, before the hustle and bustle of modern living, this statement was true, then how much truer the statement is today. Truly things are in the saddle in our time and are riding mankind. Earthly concerns--money, things, materialism in general--are paramount in many lives.

With all of this background I sat down to prepare the message from the above mentioned text. As I began to study my mind would wander to other texts in the gospel of Luke which present the same emphasis. Finally, after examining each chapter and each paragraph of the entire gospel according to Luke, I decided to present a series of scenes from the life of our Lord as presented by Luke. Each of these scenes is designed to say, "Don't become too deeply involved in the material things of life. The most important aspects of living are not physical things, but spiritual realities." But let us look at the passages in which Christ presents his teachings.

Scene Two -- Luke 5:11, 27-28

Toward the beginning of Luke's account of Christ's life we read of the occasion when he caused the disciples to put their boats out into the deep part of the Sea of Galilee and there miraculously caused them to catch a great draught of fish. The apostle Peter fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Jesus responded, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Then comes the climax of the story, "And when they had brought their boats to land, they left all, and followed him."

Across the page in my Bible there are these additional words, "And after these things he went forth, and beheld a publican, named Levi, sitting at the place of toll, and said unto him, Follow me. And he forsook all, and rose up and followed him." The picture I have in mind as I read these significant texts, relating the call of some of the early apostles, is of empty boats tied up at the edge of the Sea of Galilee, never to be used by these men again and of a table piled high with coins and tax records never to be used by Levi again. They forsook all and followed Christ.

Scene Three -- Luke 9:1-6

When Jesus sent out his twelve apostles with the limited commission to the people of Palestine, he did it in an unusual way, as described in these words, "And he called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. And he sent them forth to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor wallet, nor bread, nor money; neither have two coats. And into whatsoever house ye enter, there abide, and thence depart. And as many as receive you not, when you depart from that city, shake off the dust of your feet for a testimony against them. And they departed, and went throughout the villages, preaching the gospel, and healing everywhere." Note the unusual and yet strong emphasis upon taking nothing of a physical nature with them--no wallet, no bread, no money, not even two coats.

Scene Four -- Luke 9:57-62

At the end of the long chapter nine of Luke, we read again, "And as they went on their way, a certain man said unto him, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. (We understand the meaning to be that his father was elderly and he wished some time before following the Lord to allow his father to finish his life and be buried.) But he said unto him, Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but go thou and publish abroad the kingdom of God. And another also said, I will follow thee, Lord; but first suffer me to bid farewell to them that are at my house. But Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Here are three men who had a desire to follow Christ. They were leaning toward Christ, yet they were so deeply rooted in the things that were behind that they were unable to pull away. The result seems to be that Jesus passed on and they remained with their possessions, to bury their dead, and to continue their social responsibilities. It is easy to get so involved in the material things of life that we find it virtually impossible to follow the Lord.

Scene Five -- Luke 12:13-21

This text finds Christ approached by a young man who says, "Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me. But he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto him, Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." This is one of the most profound of Christ's statements. Success does not depend upon how much a man owns.

At this point Jesus then told his familiar story of a rich farmer who when a new crop came in tore down his old barns and built bigger ones so that he might store his surplus. The farmer then said to himself, "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 treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

Scene Six -- Luke 12:22-43

The next scene is one which we discover in Matthew's account to be a part of the Sermon on the Mount. Luke presents it in these words, "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 or barn; 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 to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven; how much more shall he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye 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, but 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."

Scene Seven -- Luke 14:12-14

Our next scene is the one in which Jesus emphasizes that dinners and feasts ought not to be made simply for the purpose of causing others to be in one's debt and thereby either to return a dinner or some special favor to the host. Jesus said, "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen, nor rich neighbors; lest haply they also bid thee again and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, bid the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; because they have not wherewith to recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just." How easy it is even for our good to be lavished upon those who need it least of all and for motives that are hardly Christian.

Scene Eight -- Luke 18:18-27

Yet another scene in the life of our Lord finds a rich young ruler asking Jesus, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus told him to keep the commandments and even named several of the Ten Commandments for him. The young man replied, "All these things have I observed from my youth up. And when Jesus heard it, he said unto him, One thing thou lackest even yet: Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow me. But when he heard these things, he became exceeding sorrowful; for he was very rich. And Jesus seeing him said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to enter in through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they that heard it said, Then who can be saved? But he said, The things that are impossible with men are possible with God."

Scene Nine -- Luke 19:45-46

Surely Christ would find spiritual matters given the stronger emphasis in the temple. However, tragically, such was not the case. We read, "And he entered into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold, saying unto them, It is written, And my house shall be a house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of robbers." Even here, the material and physical had crowded out the spiritual and had corrupted religion.

Scene Ten -- Luke 21:1-4

Finally, let us notice the scene found very near the end of Christ's life. "And he looked up, and saw the rich men that were casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, This poor widow cast in more than they all: for all these did of their superfluity cast unto the gifts; but she of her want did cast in all the living that she had.

Conclusion

By way of summary allow me now to read five sentences taken from the text of Luke. First, I shall return to Luke 16:14, where we read, "And the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things; and they scoffed at him." The expression "lovers of money" is especially significant. They thought Christ's emphasis on the spiritual was ridiculous. They scoffed at his teaching that things were relatively unimportant.

The second sentence of summary is simply the phrase, "Anxious and troubled about many things." This is an apt, yet disturbing description of our time.

Our third summary sentence refers to the calling of the apostles, where we read, "They left all and followed him." This is basically the requirement of all who would become Christians.

Our fourth sentence of summary is at the end of the longest passage that we have quoted in our study today. It says simply, "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also." This is the basic central issue involved. If our treasures are in material things, there our hearts also will be centered. God wants us to center our love upon him and upon spiritual, eternal things rather than upon material, transient, earthly things.

Finally, we notice Christ's sentence, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." How wrong men have been down through the ages in thinking that success is to be measured in terms of one's possessions.

God made man in his own image. This means that man's life is too important to be aimed at mere material things. We must aim our lives at something more permanent and more important than the transient, material things of this earth. This suggests the importance of coming to Christ to give him first place in our lives. Many of us who began to follow the Lord many years ago need to rededicate our lives, giving him first place in our hearts. Others, who have never become Christians need to begin now to let the Lord guide them toward their eternal destiny. Only if Christ is the center of our existence can we hope to be free from the blight of our generation so aptly phrased by the Lord as he said, "Anxious and troubled about many things."