

“The Care of This World”

“he also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” (Mat 13:2).

The Apostle John defines the underlying principles upon which the entire world is based:

“... all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 Jno. 2:16-17).

The world is transient, and not eternal. All of the foundation principles that govern it's operation shall ultimately pass away - but those who stand aside and instead do the Will of God will abide for ever. Peter also describes this principle in speaking of the believers:

“... being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word by which the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

Notice that again, even the greatest of man's glory will fail, like wild flowers withering away. But for the faithful, there is hope: the Word of God will not pass away, but will rather endure for ever. And those who receive it into themselves become “born again”, with a new life and existence. Being born of the incorruptible Seed, they will themselves endure for ever in the sight of God.

Our opening citation is from Messiah's parable of the Sower. Here, there are varying conditions of men's hearts into which the Word-Seed is implanted. Matthew 13:22 speaks of the care of this world, using the symbol of Thorns. That which will gain a stranglehold upon the growing Seed, are not the trials and tribulations of this life, as one might suppose. Rather, the parabolic thorns are the cares, and riches, and pleasures (Luk. 8:14) of this life. These are real threats to the new man of the spirit – that which is born again by the Word of God. Indeed, it is quite possible for them to slowly develop a stranglehold upon that new life, without our even realising it!

The Apostle also describes the ground that bears thorns:

*“... for the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but **that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected**, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned” (Heb. 6:7-8).*

Thorns are reminiscent of the Curse of God upon the earth (Gen. 3:18), and those who permit their hearts to be overrun with them, shall themselves be cursed. They will bear no fruit, and so prove themselves to be useless, fit only for destruction.

The Lord also warns his disciples:

“... take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, **and cares of this life**, and so that day come upon you unawares” (Lu. 21:34).

The command is to “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things will be added unto you” (Mat. 6:33). If our priorities are for the furtherance of the Truth, then we will escape the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet. 1:4), by holding fast to the principles of the Word. But if we are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Tim 3:4), then the day of the Lord’s coming will come upon us “unawares”, and we will not have prepared ourselves for it!

The Apostle makes the same point elsewhere, but using a different metaphor:

“Thou, therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth **entangleth himself with the affairs of this life**; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier ...” (2 Tim. 2:4).

Here is the exhortation: do not become entangled with the affairs of this life! King David famously did this in his indiscretion with Bath-Sheba. He was chosen by God to deliver his people from their enemies (2 Sam. 3:18), yet rather than to be battling on the front line, he stayed at home. Then, he was tempted by the lust of the eyes, and the lust of the flesh, and committed adultery with Bath-Sheba. He lost his focus in fighting the Lord’s battles, and became entangled with worldly affairs and pleasures. Then, he committed murder, having Bath-Sheba’s husband destroyed by the enemies of Israel. But by contrast, Uriah’s thoughts were on the front line, and he declined to enjoy the pleasures of home life:

“Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing” (2 Sam. 11:11)

Uriah, then, a Gentile, became an example of dedication to king David, and refused to be distracted from his place on the front line. His heart was with those who were in the battle to secure Israel – and so he was not entangled with the pleasures and cares of this life.

The Apostle Peter’s exhortation is relevant here, speaking of those who promise liberty from the constraints of the Truth:

“... while they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the

knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (2 Pet. 2:19-20)

We saw above, that the thorns include cares, pleasures and riches. But there are those who trust in those things, rather than the provisions of God. Hence Paul exhorted:

“charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim 6:17).

The Psalmist also speaks of the demise of those who trusted in their wealth:

“... God shall likewise destroy thee for ever ... the righteous also shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him: Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but **trusted in the abundance of his riches**, and strengthened himself in his wickedness” (cp. Psalm 52 – whole Psalm).

It is written that “wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it” (Ecc. 7:12). To trust in riches cannot profit in the long term – but wisdom can save us from death.

NABAL THE FOOL

In our Old Testament readings for today, we have the example of Nabal, the fool. He was a very wealthy man, who indulged himself in his riches, rather than to help others - by contrast to Abigail, his virtuous wife (1 Sam. 25:2-3). He was approached by David, who was fleeing for his life from Saul, to provide provisions for himself and those that were with him. But Nabal, being a “churlish” man, refused. Rather he held a feast in his house, and became “very drunken” (vs. 36) in the over indulgence of his opulent wealth.

Abigail on the other hand, was of a totally different spirit. She provided for David and his men (vs 18), and humbled herself before him. Hence Nabal died in his drunken orgy, being smitten by the Lord, and Abigail subsequently became David’s wife.

The Lord appears to be alluding back to these events, in his parable of the man who built bigger barns, recorded in Luke 12. Here, the man laid up treasures for himself:

“and I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, **Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee:** then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided. So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Lu. 12:15-21)

The name “Nabal” literally means “fool”, and this man in his folly took pleasure in the abundance of his riches, rather than to provide for David’s needs. He was not rich toward God and so perished without hope. Such will be the end of those who trust in the benefits and pleasures of this life: as Messiah himself said in this context: “Take heed, and beware

of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses" (Lu. 12:15).

Another aspect to the cares of this life, is anxiety about what the future will bring. Paul exhorted the Philippian brethren and sisters:

"do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6, ESV).

There is a danger when we live in a world of constant change and uncertainty, that we become preoccupied with anxious thoughts. But as we cited earlier, if we seek first the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness, all other things that we have need of will be provided (Mat. 6:33). We must not fret therefore, in our difficult circumstances, but rather trust in the Lord: "casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).

We must not be desirous of riches, and neither should we be anxious about how we will be provided for. The correct balance is shown in Proverbs 30:

"... remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is Yahweh? Or else I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8-9).

The days are near when Messiah shall come again in his kingdom, with power and great glory. In that day, our wealth and prosperity in this life will be irrelevant. The Lord is no respecter of persons, and shall judge righteously. In that day, where we have spent our strength and endeavours will determine our judgment:

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7-8).

We will indeed reap as we have sown: we shall be judged according to our deeds (Rom. 2:6). We cannot serve God and Mammon. We must therefore refocus on where our priorities lie. We must give ourselves over to the affairs of the coming kingdom of God, seeking it first in all our ways. Then, we will not be strangled by the matters of daily living, and the deceitfulness of riches. Rather, we shall be partakers of the coming Glory in the Kingdom of God – which is worth far more than anything this world has to offer!

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