

The Christian And The World (Part Ten)

Resisting Satan

John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)

Given 14-Nov-98; Sermon #367

It may be a little bit difficult to get into the flow of this sermon because it is the conclusion of a series that I titled *Resisting the World*. I began this series all the way back in December of 1997, but I stopped it in late April because I felt constrained to give some messages on the Y2K problem. And then, actually I picked out something that I was beginning to learn from the *Resisting the World* sermons and began to give a series on the Holy Spirit.

You might recall that the *Resisting the World* series centered on Matthew 6: 19-34, which contains Jesus' teaching regarding principles essential to keeping one's life headed toward the Kingdom of God and at the same time, unspotted from the world. We are to be non-conforming in many respects as far as this world is concerned.

World is simply the Bible's term to designate the organized system that dominates this earth and all of its cultures, and it is opposed to God. It is ruled by the invisible principalities and powers (demons) that Paul mentioned several different times. It must always be remembered that at the world's base are beliefs and attitudes that produce conduct that is opposed to God.

Please turn to Ephesians 2 because I want to read the verse that was getting me so interested in spirit, because it impacts very greatly on resisting the world.

Ephesians 2:2 Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience.

The way this worded in the English makes it very easy to assume that *spirit* there is referring directly back to Satan and implies someone who is a being. But that is not what it is. The grammar will not permit that. Spirit here is not a being but an energizing power.

That spirit, that attitude, or should I say bundle of attitudes, motivates, impels, and drives the conduct that has produced a variety of cultures in this world. Now that bundle of attitudes has its foundation, its beginning, in pride; and Satan and his demons are its fount.

So it is not wrong to assume in Ephesians 2:2 that Satan is within the context, but the word spirit primarily is referring to this motivating power that is behind much of the world.

This bundle of attitudes is communicated to mankind, which in turn unwittingly uses them against God and each other. It is highly competitive, narcissistic, anti-God, and it uses and manipulates to control for self-advantage. As such, it creates the cultures that show similar characteristics. This is very appealing to human nature—to want to go along, to conform to what it feels familiar and comfortable with, and to do what everybody else is doing.

We have a clear example of this in regard to our President. He is an adulterer many times over. Besides that, he is a compulsive, manipulative liar who uses people and then disloyally hangs them out to dry to fend for themselves. But this recent election and the polls that were taken leading up to it show that quite a large portion of the American people do not disapprove. They say it is his own private business and consistently give him high approval ratings apparently because they live lifestyles similar to his and have the added benefit of being able to live comfortably financially. They might also approve because he justifies them in their way of life. And so, he is conforming to them, and they are conforming to him.

Now the good news for us is that we are not helpless against this spirit. Paul said in Romans 12, “Do not be conformed to this world.” He would never had said that if it was impossible to resist.

Because of what God has done in calling us, opening our minds to His truth, granting us repentance and giving us His Spirit, we can choose instead to conform to God's way, but it does take faith in God to do this. We must be aware of the inclinations that tend to move us toward conforming to this world.

That is what this series of sermons focused on because that is what Jesus' focus was on in this section of the Sermon on the Mount. The primary instruction from Matthew 6:19-34 is against covetousness. Now why? What does that have to do with not being conformed to the world?

A very familiar scripture in I John 2:15-16:

I John 2:15-16 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the LUST of the flesh...

The tenth commandment involves covetousness. Paul says in Colossians 3:5 that covetousness is idolatry. Lust is covetousness. You get the connection?

I John 2:16 ...and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

The way to resist the world is to resist covetousness. And so, this section in Matthew 6:19-34 is a sermon by Jesus warning against covetousness even though the word is never mentioned. But the thought is there. The world appeals to us through covetousness—lust. The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, but it is combined with the pride of life, which convinces us that we deserve all of the goodies that the world has to offer. So this message from Jesus beginning in Matthew 6:19 shows us how to deflect the world's appeal.

In verse 19 it says:

Matthew 6:19-21 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break

through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The first principle that He covers is, of course, the admonition not to lay up treasures on earth, but rather in heaven, because where our treasure is will motivate our action. Treasure is what we seek. It is what appeals to our desire and if the desire gets out of hand and we do not control it, it is very easy for us to conform to the world's way of getting these things.

Now notice He used the word heart. “For where your treasure is there will your heart be also.” This is the word that got me started off on that series on the Holy Spirit. The reason was because I began to notice how many times, how frequently, in scripture the words “heart,” “thought,” (thought has to do with the mind, heart has to do with the mind) and sometimes the word “mind” itself appeared. They were all connected to the word spirit. They were used interchangeably to indicate an invisible, immaterial source of motivation or conduct. Where your treasure is, the spirit will drive you in that direction. The desire to have it.

The principle of treasure has to do with what we allow ourselves to cherish, to desire, to honor, to hold as important, because we will be powerfully motivated to seek after what we consider valuable to our sense of well-being and security, and we will be motivated to go get it. If we have to conform to the world to get it, we will do it unless we control it.

So the admonition then is to make sure that what we seek in life is in conformity with what is spiritually correct, not politically correct, but spiritually correct. That is, those things that fall within what is acceptable within the relationship with God. Within the relationship with Him in this way of life and what is acceptable for the Kingdom of God.

Now verse 22 goes off in a little bit different direction, but it still has to do with this same overall concept.

Matthew 6:22-23 The light of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light. But if your eye be evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!

The second principle in this sermon against covetousness had to do with the light of the body being the eye. Light is that element that enables us to see clearly, and this is the key to understanding this. In the physical realm, light is that element that enables us to see clearly and to avoid dangers and pitfalls. If you are blind, you run into things. If you can see, you have light, therefore you can avoid those things in your direction so your life can be much more secure, safer, and more productive.

What in the spiritual realm corresponds to light in the physical realm? We might say it is truth and that would not be wrong. One can have truth, but if they do not understand it, what good is it? Spiritually, the light of the mind is to understand truth. If you understand truth, then you can use it to avoid all of the spiritual pitfalls in life. You can avoid covetousness if you understand truth, believe it, and act on it. So spiritually, it is understanding the truths of God that gives clear guidance in order to avoid the dangers and pitfalls to spiritual reality.

So the second admonition therefore is to seek understanding of God's way. One verse jumps right out from God's word. "A good understanding have all they that do His commandments." Now that is one key to getting understanding. But it also requires other things. One has to study. One has to meditate. One has to pray. One has to be observant of life, watching the lives of others, remembering the things we have gone through. Those things give understanding. (We are just reviewing here.)

Matthew 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

The third principle, having to do with how to avoid covetousness and being attracted by the world, involves loyalty. No one can serve two masters. It is impossible. Absolutely impossible. No one can do it. Whether it is in the physical realm in terms of one's employment, whether it is in a marriage, whether it is in relation to God, nobody can serve two masters. So loyalty, Jesus teaches, is essential to this.

We must not allow our loyalties to be divided between God and His way and this world and its way. It is impossible to serve God, the self, and the world equally. There has to be a decision made. We cannot avoid it or the world will grab us, because we will give in. The appeals to our human nature are so powerful that we have to be absolutely devoted and committed to God or we will get washed away by the appeal, by the spirit of this world.

That is why Jesus, in Luke 14:26 (which we always go through before baptism to count the cost), says we have got to put Him first in life or there is no use even getting baptized.

Matthew 6:25 Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

The word “therefore” is important; do not just shove it aside here. It ties the rest of the chapter to verse 25. The rest of the chapter is actually an expounding of things involving not serving two masters and being loyal.

Jesus gave more illustrations on this third principle than all the others combined, because it is the one that is going to give us the most trouble in terms of practical day to day application. It is the one which requires the most consistent daily use of faith.

Now the lesson is against anxiety, and it is for faith in God. Anxiety is a spirit which will move us toward the world practically more swiftly than anything else.

What Jesus admonishes here in these six or seven next verses is unnerving to our sense of security. Anxiety is very easily created in this world because the here and the now is very real, and God seems so far off. He seems detached. And so we worry how we will be taken care of, how we will be provided for? What will happen if we really do strive to conform to God's way? Are we going to feel like we have been strung out, hung out to dry—that God has turned His back, that He has gone way off, that He is not real?

Jesus' illustrations show us that God, though invisible, is not a God who is far off. He is not detached, but He is very much aware and involved in the moment-by-moment operations of His purpose.

The essence of each one of these illustrations is essentially the same. Jesus uses arguments—lines of reasoning—from the lesser to the greater. That is, if God is so involved with things that all of us would consider to be very minor, how much more focused, concerned, and involved is He in the lives of His children? To think otherwise, brethren, is an insult to God. It is an insult to His providence. God tells us very plainly that He sustains the universe by the word of His power. He tells us that He is "God with us"—that is one of His names. What we have to decide, if we are going to be loyal, is can God be trusted? That is the unspoken question that runs through this whole thing. Can God be trusted?

It is interesting (at least I found it interesting) that in Jesus' illustration regarding God's providence here that He did not reflect upon the journey through the wilderness. It is a tremendous, I mean absolutely mind boggling, example of His providence of being able to supply two and a half or three million people for forty years with all the food and all the water that they needed out in the middle of a wilderness. But He did not reflect upon that. Instead what He did, He used illustrations that could easily be taken from anybody's world at any time at any place. Whether it is in Palestine or Russia or Colorado for that matter.

His thought is this: that since God has already done this (the lesser, or the less important thing), it is inconceivable He would fail to do the greater (what is more important). His thought is based on the unfailing character God, the One we have made a covenant with, the One who said that He is the faithful God, that He is faithful to fulfill His part of the agreement that He has agreed to.

I want you to consider this because when you went down under that water at baptism you were committing your life to God; you were committing to Him. You were saying to Him, even though the words may have never been spoken, "Dependence upon you, Father, is going to be the law of my life." Faith is THE issue. Love is the greatest of God's attributes, but without faith in God, there will never be any love of God in us. Faith is the foundation of

everything that follows, and we are commanded by God to live by faith. If we do, the love will be there. But if we do not live by faith, I can guarantee you, no love will be produced in our lives. There will be no transference of the spirit of God to us and out in actions of love because we do not show any faith in God, or very little faith in God. It is the key.

Do we believe that this Almighty Creator has the power and the concern and that He is intimately involved with us? Little old me, a speck in the great universe, personally? That He wants us to invite Him into an involvement in our marriage, child rearing, job, entertainment, community relationships. Will we pray without ceasing? Will we share our life in real fellowship with Him? Faith is the issue, and the relationship to Him is the key to success in life because He is the fountain of every good and perfect gift. But faith is the key to that success and it is no wonder that Jesus spent more time on this one issue, in how to resist the world, than all of the others combined. God is the source of all sound mindedness—things that He can create in us that will survive the grave and be carried into the Kingdom of God. And so in verse 26 the first illustration is. . .

Matthew 6:26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they?

From the lesser, the fowl, to the greater, you. Will this God who takes care of birds take care of you, the greater? Now birds neither sow nor reap but God does take care of them.

We have to be careful, here, because the instruction is not that we should neglect work. Some, unfortunately (I do not know if this has happened in the church of God), have done this. We can learn this from birds, too, because they are very busy. They are flitting all over the place. Birds are not lazy. If we are using this illustration, birds also teach us that a certain amount of self-care is necessary. God expects work because the birds illustrate that they do not sit on a twig, open their beak and God drops in a seed or worm into their mouths. Birds do not overdo a good thing, do they?

So there is a balance that the scripture shows us in regard to us. Though God supplies and the birds work, they are not guilty like the rich fool. You know

where that instruction is? It is in Luke 12. Jesus laid something down here that I think is good to touch on.

Luke 12:13-15 And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother that he divide the inheritance with me. And he said unto him, Man, [this is God speaking] who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.

So right on the heels of this then He spoke a parable unto them saying. . .

Luke 12:16-21 The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, And he thought within himself, saying, "What shall I do, because I have no room 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 fruits and my goods." And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." But God said unto him, "You fool, this night your soul shall be required of you; then whose shall those things be which you have provided? So is he that lays up treasure [connect this back to Matthew 6] for himself [lays up treasure on earth], and is not rich toward God."

Covetousness is involved in this issue. We have a man here who was constantly gathering and building up his reserves. Now Jesus, God in the flesh, shows that He will not be a part of furthering someone's selfish interest. This does not mean that a person cannot build up riches apart from God. That is not the issue here. But if they do that, they do it apart from God. He is not involved. He will not support somebody's covetousness. And He most assuredly will not support covetousness in us. So there is a balance. God expects us to work. The bird works. But it does not store up huge amounts of food. So there is a balance that the scripture shows us.

So God shows His care for birds by providing an instinct for them to be unconcerned about storing up and all the while providing enough for them to survive. There is the lesson. God will take care of us. He wants us to work. But if covetousness works itself into our mind and that becomes the

motivation for the energetic way that we proceed for riches and treasure, God will not be in us. He will back out. He will not support somebody's sin.

Now Jesus Himself gave an example, in His own life, which Paul records in II Corinthians 8. It is just a brief statement.

II Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich [in heaven, as God], yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich.

I want you to think for just a moment about His example, the way His life was lived. Jesus was, undoubtedly, the most talented human being who ever walked on the face of this earth. If there was ever anybody who was equipped with a mind to become wealthy, it was Him. But what did He do? He controlled Himself. He focused on the work that God wanted Him to do and He lived the life that would allow God to supply to Him. Paul describes Him as being in poverty, personally. Maybe it is a relative term, but it was poverty compared to the way He was in heaven. He Himself said He had no place to lay His head. The Bible makes it very clear that there were people who were taking care of Him, providing Him with money. It is interesting that the people named were all women.

Romans 10:12 For there is no difference between Jew and Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

Our God will supply all of our needs through Christ Jesus.

Now if God supplies for lower creatures, how much more will He care for those who, being His children, are being created in His image? So really, the only question for us is, "Are we more valuable than birds? Can we have faith that God will supply?" So it is unreasonable to think that the one who upholds the universe by the word of His power will not supply our needs, especially when we consider that we are the apple of His eye.

Back to Matthew 6:27. This one is really interesting.

Matthew 6:27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

Now again, this is a lesson on the senselessness of anxiety. In this case, Jesus asked a question that can again be only answered one way if we are going to do it honestly. Anxiety over whether one of God's children will be provided for is as senseless as thinking that someone can add a cubit to his height.

Jesus is implying that this adding to a person's height is something that would be very small. See, from lesser to greater. I want you to hold your finger there because we are going to look at one verse and maybe add something here that will help to clarify. In Luke 12:26 (it is the same sermon), but Luke adds one word.

Luke 12:26 If you then be not able to do that thing which is least [add a cubit], why take you thought for the rest?

If you cannot do this little thing, how do you expect to do something that is really big?

The translation that the King James and many other Bibles have followed is somewhat misleading. Now there are commentators who believe that there is another one that is more correct. I am commenting to you that I believe that there is another one that is more correct.

The Greek word that is translated “stature” simply implies length. Therefore, it can be used in terms of height because vertically we are a length. It can be used in terms of that which is horizontal (length of a mile). It can be used in terms of breath or depth of something. It can even be used to mean maturity when contrasted to immaturity. And it can be used in terms of the length of a person's life. Now this is the one that I think Jesus really implied.

Now here is why I think that this is true. A cubit is as short as 18 inches or as long as 24. It is measured from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, and

so will generally be between 18 and 24 inches. Now, if one adds one cubit to his height—18 inches—that is no little thing. That would make a 6 foot man, 7 foot 6. That is a gigantic thing, not a little thing.

I think what Jesus implied was the life, or adding one cubit to a person's life. Now look at it this way. The alternative meaning is this. Who among you, by worrying, can lengthen the pathway of his life by ever so little? Now a person on his birthday might remark, “Well I have reached another milepost.” I have heard people say that. On the 70th anniversary of a person's birth that person has reached 70 mileposts. Let us do a little bit of mathematics. Adding a cubit (18 inches) to 70 times 5,280 feet is a very small thing. Eighteen inches is one four-millionths of that period of time.

So Jesus was asking this question then. If a person lived 70 years, can you even add one four-millionths to your life by worrying, by fretting, by getting all anxious. Brethren, we understand today that if a person is filled with anxiety, if a person is filled with fretting, it cuts your life short!

You see, even adding a cubit to your life cannot be done. And in addition to that there is something even more devastating. Anxiety might be the number one enemy of faith. It destroys it. It reveals that faith is not even there; and if there was some, it erodes it away very quickly.

A person might fret very badly and worry himself to death. We have heard that. You cannot worry yourself into a longer life span.

Back in Psalm 39 the psalmist says something in regard to this beginning in verse 4.

Psalm 39:4-6 LORD, make me to know my end, and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am. Behold, you have made my days as a handbreadth and mine age is as nothing before you: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah. Surely every man walks [lives his life] in a vain show...he heaps up riches and knows not who shall gather them.

What we have to learn is the lesson this psalmist was talking about. “Help me to know my days. Help me to learn to accept my state and to be content

with it by means of the fact of the knowledge that our lives are lived in the hand of the Almighty.” Do you remember that psalm that we sing so frequently, Psalm 127, “...unless the Lord build the house they labor in vain?”

Now let me show you something here in I Corinthians 3, because I want us to take this very personally. I want us to compare ourselves to these two men.

I Corinthians 3:5-7 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that plants anything, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase.

Now if these two men could do nothing of themselves, what can we think of that might nullify this principle? Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing.” Faith in God has become the law of our life. We either both have it and use it, or we are going nowhere fast, spiritually.

Now a simple question to those of you who are parents. Do you not know that your children will need food and clothing? What about all of their fretting when they are hungry? Does not help a bit does it? Not at all.

Let us turn to another place here in Psalm 75. We have got to get ourselves oriented in the right direction or the world will grab us. Listen to this counsel:

Psalm 75:5-7 Lift not up your horn [A horn in the Bible is used as a symbol of strength. So God says, “Do not blow your own horn. Do not be vainly puffed up over what you have accomplished.]; speak not with a stiff neck. For promotion [prosperity, security, sound mindedness, and growth] comes neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he puts down one and he sets up another.

We have a decision to make. Is He involved in our lives? If He is, then we are in the best hands that we could possibly be. So why fret, why worry, why get all anxious? He is going to take care of us, and He will promote us in ways that are right for us toward His end.

So we have to learn to trust God's judgment and at the same time work lawfully and humbly, seek His blessing, rest contentedly with His judgment and accept gratefully whatever it is that He apportions us. Otherwise, our lives are going to be filled with discontent. And I think that I personally know what I am talking about, here. It is very easy for me to become like this, discontented with my lot in life.

Let us go back to Matthew 6.

Matthew 6:28-29 And why take you thought for raiment?
Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Now it is good to remember again that verses 26-30 are an elaboration of verse 25. This particular illustration is a parallel of verse 26. Now first we had food. The question was about food and the assurance given that God would provide it. And now we have clothing to be considered and that God will provide for that.

Now Jesus drew on this a little bit more strongly because He said “consider,” meaning notice carefully. Actually, study into it. And so He asked the question, “Why be concerned about clothing?”

Let us study, then, the field lilies or the wild flowers. Maybe they were day lilies, I do not know. Without any toil at all, freely, easily they put out their blooms; and they are gorgeous. Man may try to match, but we fall short of the pristine beauty that comes from the hand of God. And everything that we do in this regard to beauty, artistry, is nothing more than mimicry of what God has already done. We cannot even begin to match it. And yet God is so abundant in His gifts that what is beautiful one day is the source of fire and heat the next. And then the day after that, the beauty is restored through other flowers just as gorgeous as the ones which died the day before. And both have the same source. The same God did it.

The lesson for this follows in verse 30.

Matthew 6:30-32 Wherefore, if God so clothed the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek) for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things.

If God will provide for the short-lived grass, surely, SURELY He is going to take care of His children. How could we think otherwise? His children are destined for eternal glory! They are not going to be thrown into the oven tomorrow and burned to heat up bread. If God decks the wild flowers with such beautiful garments, surely He is going to clothe His children with the ordinary garments that they need.

Now there is something interesting, here, in regards to faith again. Jesus called His disciples, those who were sitting there listening to this, men of *little* faith.

Now when we get to the end of the story in Luke 24, a couple of Jesus' other disciples (those men who were walking with Him after His resurrection on the road to Emmaus)...by the time they got almost to Emmaus Jesus said to them that they were fools and slow to believe all that was written about Him in the prophets.

Where do we fall in regard to faith? If they had little faith (they who were living right in front of Him), where do we stand when we cannot even see Him? Our faith must really be tiny. We worry about the things that Matthew 6 is talking about. I will admit to you that I do. I do not mean that I get real anxious and uptight all the time, but they cross my mind, and I could easily go in that direction. I like to be at peace. I like to feel secure. I like to feel warm and snugly. I like to feel well taken care of, provided for. And my mind can always dream of things that I should have, but feel that I do not. All of us are capable of that.

I have mentioned this before. We know that our children need food and clothing and do we not take care of them? Surely, how much better can God do it? From the lesser to the greater. He will take care of us, but He wants us to work. Because work has a place in His purpose.

You do not have to turn to this; I will just read it to you. In Ephesians 3:20:

Ephesians 3:20-21 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Now in Matthew 6:33 we reach the climatic conclusion of this section.

Matthew 6:33 But seek you first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

This is what will make us distinctive in the use of our lives. "Seek" denotes priority. Seek you first; seek first. But the verb there, "seek," can also be translated "be *constantly* seeking." It is the difference between writing something passively and writing it actively. In the Greek, it is in the active. Be constantly seeking.

What Jesus is saying there is that if we are using the faith that we presently have toward this end, toward the Kingdom of God, we will be supplied with more faith in the more difficult circumstances as the need arrives. But we must be using what we already have.

So the instruction, here, or the admonition, is to give priority to this direction combined with a continuous, persevering, and strenuous effort to obtain. Now to seek the Kingdom of God in practical day-to-day operation means to acknowledge God as our ruler through obedience in every sphere of life: in government, in education, in industry, in science, in business, in agriculture, in fashion, in entertainment, in marriage, in dating. And when one does that, righteousness will prevail in his life.

Paul wrote here in Romans 14:17-18:

Romans 14:17-18 For the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he that in these things serves Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

The Kingdom of God is righteousness!

Now this thrust to our lives is to be constant—diligent of search into every sphere of life. It must be accompanied by ceaseless and strenuous effort to obtain—to be diligent. The Kingdom of God and His righteousness are both something given and something obtained. So there should be a cooperation between us and God similar to that of a tree. We will take something from nature again. You know, a tree has no power to maintain itself. It is completely dependent on soil, rain, air, and sunshine. And yet it just does not sit there and do nothing. It sends forth its roots. It sends forth its leaves. Its capillary systems are enormously active, and they are doing their thing in order to produce the fruit that the tree exists for. The same should be true of us.

Now it says in Philippians 2... I have to admit that I am just beginning to understand this verse much fuller and deeper than I ever have in the past.

Philippians 2:12-13 Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For [that word “for” connects to the thought of verse 12; it is its explanation] it is God which works in you both to WILL and to DO.

God gives us the will to seek Him, to seek His Kingdom, and to seek His righteousness; and God gives us the power to do it. But do we believe it enough to yield? That is all, brethren, that we have to do. God does everything else. *Everything!* I kid you not. Just like the tree. The tree works, but God supplies everything else. God supplies the rain. God supplies the soil. God designed the capillary system. God designed the leaves. God made

the leaves able to convert sunlight through photosynthesis into another product. God gives the increase in the fruit. God does everything. The tree just stands there and responds and the fruit comes.

Now we are the tree, but we have got to exercise faith in making the choices to seek God in obedience in marriage, in government, in education, in industry, in science, in business, in agriculture, fashion, entertainment. Every aspect of life. By faith we seek God's way and as we begin to do that in obedience to Him, He supplies what we need.

Now in Matthew 6:34 He says:

Matthew 6:34 Take therefore no thought [this is repeated, no anxious thought] for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Providing for tomorrow is one thing, because He tells us we do need to make preparations. But worrying about it, fretting about it, getting all anxious about it is another thing altogether. Anything more than just a normal concern for the purposes of planning is always wrong. If we worry about tomorrow today, what is going to happen to today? We are going to destroy it. And we will lose today because we are worried about tomorrow. Anxiety is the enemy of faith.

Right within the context that we have gone through is the instruction that the only right way to provide for tomorrow, without becoming anxious, is to obey the admonition today to seek the Kingdom of God. Today has been given to us. Make the best use of it (Jesus instructs) that you can, by making use of your faith. Be grateful for what we do have and show it by doing today what God requires of us.

Do you remember reading in Psalm 95 . . . “*Today* if you will hear His voice.” Paul used that principle in Hebrews 3. Because when tomorrow comes, it is going to have its own troubles. But, there will also be renewed strength because of what we did yesterday if indeed yesterday was done in relation to God, in relation to His kingdom, and in relation to His righteousness.

Can you remember what it says in Lamentations 3, verses 22 and 23—a verse that has application to our time today and the scattering of the Church? One of the hopeful things in the book. It says:

Lamentations 3:22-23 It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is your faithfulness.

Now reflect again on the wilderness. Did not God supply them with manna every single day? Did He not supply them with water right out of solid granite, maybe? Of course He did. Their shoes did not wear out. He protected them from their enemies. That is the kind of thing that Jesus was thinking of.

Now, in conclusion, in order to avoid all of the powerful appeals of this world, Jesus appeals to us to focus our trust in God by giving first priority in our lives to seeking the Kingdom of God TODAY! That is how faith is built. TODAY. Making use of today and not letting it slip by. As we use faith today we can be assured from God's word, from His promises, when we get to tomorrow—that day will have its own trials—but our God will supply our need for that day, too, not just in food and clothing, but also in the spiritual things as well, including faith.

Salvation is by grace through faith and that not of yourself. The faith is a gift from God so that we can be saved. He gives us everything! All we have to do is say, “Yes, Lord,” and do it.

Point #1: The feverish anxiety of seeking this world is first and foremost idolatry. It is a tremendous affront to God. This is important because attachment to this world means detachment from God.

Point #2: Being preoccupied with the pursuit of material things blurs our vision (understanding) and obscures the real goal of our existence.

Point #3: It attaches primary significance to what God clearly shows is secondary—that which is material—like food or clothing. But anxiety, then, shows that those things are more important than life itself. Life *meaning* life in His kingdom.

Point #4: Anxiety defies reason—Biblical reasoning, spiritual reasoning—because (a) it barter away eternity for perishable, earthy items; (b) because it forgets that it cannot extend its life even by a fraction; (c) it borrows tomorrow's troubles as if today's are not enough; and (d) perhaps worse of all, it refuses to consider how abundantly God provides for creation—for birds and lilies. And if God does that He will surely provide for us, His children.

We are going to end this series with II Thessalonians 2, and I just want you to listen. This is a paraphrase of those verses that I have taken from what I think is probably a very little known commentary, simply called *The New Testament Commentary*.

II Thessalonians 2:13-17 (New Testament Commentary) We (Paul, Silas and Timothy) cannot do otherwise and ceaselessly thank God for you brothers in the faith, who are the objects of God's special love because in His sovereign, immutable election, God, from the beginning chose YOU for salvation, which, negatively, rescues from the guilt, pollution, and punishment of sin and, positively, entrance into the inheritance reserved for God's children. A salvation which becomes your possession through the work of the Holy Spirit, that is through sanctification, a process causing you to become increasingly detached from the world and attached to Christ, until His image is completely formed in you, through your active, vital consent to the body of redemptive truth in Christ, to which final and complete salvation God also called you, having effectively applied to your hearts the gospel which we preached to you in which we urged you to accept in order that you might one day share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Brethren, this is why we must accept this challenge to resist the world by making sure of where our treasure is, seeking understanding through obedience, study, observation, meditation, and fasting and giving our undivided loyalty to Christ and to His purpose, living by faith, confidently seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and thus allowing God to prove Himself by His response in creating Himself in us.