

For the last two Sundays, we have been studying the teachings of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount. In Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus gives us guidance for living the Christian life. If you want to know how to live each day for Jesus, then you don't have to look any farther than these three chapters. So far, we have discussed the importance of prayer in our daily life, and being the salt of the earth and the light of the world for Jesus. This morning let's continue our study in the sixth chapter of Matthew as contained in verses 25 through 34, and see what Jesus has to teach us. You can follow along on Page 6 in the New Testament of the Pew Bibles.

Read Matthew 6:25-34

If you had the chance to go back and live your life all over again, would you make any changes? Would you approach life differently? Would you make any different decisions? We have often heard it said, and we may have even said it ourselves: "If I only knew back then what I know now." Jesus dedicated much of His time to the human search for the good life. He saw men and women losing their souls in their efforts to discover things that would make them happy. In our text for this morning, Jesus is showing us how to really live the life that we have been given.

In one of the *Peanuts* comic strips, Lucy and Charlie Brown were discussing life. Lucy noted that "life is a lot like a lawn chair. Some place it to see where they have been, and others so they can see where they are at the present time." To which Charlie Brown replied: "I can't even get mine unfolded." Maybe you feel that way this morning.

There's an old saying: "Time flies when you are having fun." When you really think about it, time is a precious commodity: we can't create it; we can't really control how much time we will have on this old earth, but we can somewhat control how we will use this precious gift from God. Time is like money; you can only spend it once. Learning to manage our time is essential if we are going to live our life as God intended.

Assuming an average life span of 70 years, someone has figured out that we spend most of our time this way:

24 years sleeping

14 years working

8 years in amusements

6 years at the dinner table (now some of us may be exceeding that!)

5 years in transportation

4 years in conversation

3 years in education

2 years studying and reading

But less than one year for God; that is if a person attends a 90-minute worship service each week and prays every day for 10 minutes.

If you don't agree with these figures, then sit down this week and figure out how you have been spending your time. How much of our valuable time is truly devoted to God? When you finish this exercise, then ponder what Jesus said in Matthew 16:26 – “What good will it be for a person if they gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” Think about it: if you gave the same amount of time to your work that you do to the church, how long would you keep your job?

How we spend our time determines our priorities in life. Time is life; nothing more, nothing less. If you want to know what the focus of your life is, then look at how you spend your hours and days. In our text for this morning, Jesus gives us some guidance on how to make the most out of life.

First, He tells us that life should not be dominated by worry. We have discussed this somewhat over the past two weeks. Worry is a lot like a rocking chair; it gives you something to do, but it doesn't get you anywhere. It is natural for us to worry a little, but worry should not be the dominating force in our lives. We should not live to worry. It has been said that people spend the most time worrying about things that never happen anyway; such as how they are going to spend all that money when they win the lottery. Think of it this way: today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday. Was it worth it? Worrying about something does not change it a bit.

In addition, worrying impacts our mental and physical health. Being anxious does not result in living longer, if anything, it shortens life. Dr. Charles Mayo of the famous Mayo Clinic wrote: “Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands, and the whole nervous system. I have never met a man or known a man to die of overwork, but I have known a lot who died of worry.”

Jesus is encouraging us to relax and trust in God. Our heavenly Father loves us very much and wants to supply our daily needs. In our text Jesus draws upon God's care for His creation – the birds and flowers – to substantiate this point. A good relaxing exercise for us would be reading or reciting our responsive reading from the 23rd Psalm whenever we feel stressed or feel worried or anxious about something. I think that this is what Jesus had in mind; relaxing and trusting that the Good Shepherd will take care of us.

Jesus is also saying that life should be lived and enjoyed to the fullest. In John 10:10, Jesus said: “I have come so that you can have life; so that you can live life to the fullest.” The *Message* paraphrases Jesus' words as follows: “I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.” Some people learn too late in life how to live. Others never learn how to live at all. Jesus encourages us to take time to look at the birds of the air and consider the beautiful lilies of the field.

Many of us live like ambulances, always running at full speed with sirens blaring; going from one crisis to another. Every day is desperate and every moment is a crisis. We need to learn

how to stop and smell the roses. To really live life to its fullest and to find true happiness is to come follow Jesus and the way that He laid out for us here in the Sermon on the Mount. For in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us of love, forgiveness, patience, prayer, faithfulness, service and trust.

One of the most familiar stories in the Bible on the different approaches to living is found in the story of two very different sisters, Martha and Mary, in the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke. If you remember the story, Jesus has just finished arguing with the local religious leaders and lawyers in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and is now headed for Jerusalem and His destiny with the cross. He needs some time to relax and get away from things. So, Jesus stops in Bethany to visit His old friends Martha and Mary, and their brother Lazarus.

Martha is the oldest sister, and it is most likely her house that Jesus visited. Now Jesus was probably not traveling alone and brought several disciples with Him. Martha, being the ultimate hostess, wanted to make sure that everything was perfect. Is there anybody like this in your family; I know my mother was definitely a Martha. Martha got caught up in all the dinner preparations while Mary simply sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to His teachings. In her loving attempt to make Jesus feel welcome and comfortable, the preparations got to be too much for Martha and she was overwhelmed by all that she was trying to do. So, she went to Jesus and asked Him to tell her sister to help her.

In His reply to her Jesus said: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." The *Message* paraphrases these comments this way: "Martha, you're fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up for nothing. One thing is essential and Mary has chosen it." Do you ever feel this way, so overwhelmed by all the things you think that you have to do? Notice that I said think we have to do. Sometimes we are like Martha and create a lot of work for ourselves that we really don't need to do.

Now Jesus is not saying that reflection is better than action, or that learning is better than working. He is trying to tell us that there is a time for everything. The key is to manage our time so that we live life to the fullest. Where should we be focusing our time, energy and interests? Do we have our priorities right; is there balance in our life?

Life gives us one day at a time; that is all that we have to work with. Taking care of the present is what should concern us, not the mistakes of the past and not what might happen in the future. God basically gives us life in one-hour segments. "Do not worry about tomorrow," Jesus says. Today's concerns are enough for today. This is sound advice. If each day is lived as it comes, if each task is done as it appears, then the sum of all days is bound to be good. It is Jesus' advice that we should handle the demands of each day as they come, without worrying about the unknown future and the things that may never happen.

This was the subject of Cristy Lane's classic song *One Day at a Time*. Listen to these words: "Show me the stairway I have to climb. Lord, for my sake, teach me to take one day at a time.

One day at a time, Sweet Jesus, that's all I'm asking from you. Just give me the strength to do every day what I have to do."

It should be noted that Jesus is not arguing against planning, saving, or working. He does not want us to neglect our responsibilities, and He is not advocating idleness. Certainly, we must consider what we will eat, what we will wear, our health and our future. But we must never allow these things to become an obsession. If we do, they will become a burden to our soul, and we will find ourselves continually anxious, fearful and tired. But how can this be avoided? Well, the answer is simple and we have briefly discussed it over the past few weeks; we need to trust in God and walk in faith. We need to rest in the assurance that God both knows our needs and that He will supply them.

The *Living Bible* translates verse 33 like this: "So don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrows too. Live one day at a time." Jesus is not denying the existence of troubles, both today and tomorrow. He is not saying that we shouldn't take them seriously. Rather, we are being told that troubles can best be met by dealing with them one at a time. We can be assured that God will grant us the strength required for the troubles of tomorrow when they come; just as He provides us strength for today. Oswald Chambers in *My Utmost for His Highest* states: "It is not only wrong to worry, it is unbelief; worrying means that we do not believe that God can look after the practical details of our lives." When we trust in God, we can afford to live day by day, because we have a divine buffer between us and the disturbing events of today and tomorrow.

There is a scene in the movie *City Slickers* where Curley, the old trail boss, and Billy Crystal are riding along on horseback discussing the importance of life while driving a herd of cattle. Curley tells Billy that the secret of life is one thing. Of course, Billy, who is suffering through a mid-life crisis, wants to know right away what it is. Curley tells Billy that each person must discover that for themselves and then they will find happiness in life.

Jesus in a sense said the same thing over 2,000 years ago. The secret of life is one thing. The secret of happiness and peace of mind in this life is one thing. You will not find it in money, position, fame, your job, your possessions, drugs or even the bottle. In Philippians 4:11 and 12 the Apostle Paul says that he has found the secret of being content in any and every situation and that is in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul goes on to say in verse 13 that he can do all things through Jesus Christ who gives him strength. My friends, the secret of life, the one thing is Jesus Christ. He is the one and only thing in life. If Christ as Lord is the center of our lives, if you give Him first place in your life, then all the circumstances around us will take care of themselves.

As I noted earlier, Jesus is not saying that we should not give thought to food, clothing, health, and the future, but we must not let them become our obsession. Instead, Jesus tells us: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all the necessities of life will be given you." The goal of life is to know God, to love Him, and to trust Him. Then we will not be distracted by the worries or concerns of everyday life. The Bible begins in verse one of chapter

one of Genesis with these words: "In the beginning God." If we begin with God all else will fall into place!

Now this "seeking God" is not a one-time action, but a continual and constant seeking. We are to focus daily on God and His will for our lives. We are also called to seek His righteousness; in other words, to strive to do the things Jesus would do; to imitate His qualities in our daily lives – in our thoughts, words and actions. We are to work at becoming more like Jesus Christ each and every day of our life. When our priority is spiritual, God will take care of the material things, the necessities of life; for where God guides, He provides.

At the cathedral in Milan, Italy, there is an inscription over each of the three doorways. Over the right door there is the statement: "All that pleases is but for a moment." Over the left door the words are: "All that troubles is but for a moment." But over the center door, there is a simple sentence: "Nothing is important save that which is eternal." The secret to living life to the fullest is to put Jesus Christ first. Are you giving Jesus your time, the time He deserves? Is He a priority in your life or an afterthought? Does He get first crack at your time or just what's left over and when it is convenient for you?

Jesus is asking us to put Him first in our life, let Him be our top priority. If we will only make time for Him and give Him a chance, we will be surprised by the difference it will make not only in our life, but the lives of those around us. Make a commitment this morning to put Jesus first in your life. May we each follow Jesus' advice on how to live: relaxing and trusting in the goodness of God, living life to the fullest by living and serving others, and taking one day at a time. Amen