

“Take therefore no thought for the morrow”

A command that must be understood in context.

“Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” (Mat 6:34)

The advice the Lord gives in this verse is difficult to apply. If we try to obey it in isolation, we will surely fail, because we naturally fear evil and are very prone to consuming thoughts about our problems. *It is not possible to stop worrying just by willing it. We must push worry out with something else.*

Before we look into what the Lord meant by His command, let us look at the context in which He gives it. That will give us many things that will help us push out worry and overthinking things with something else.

Our Lord’s command, at the end of the Sixth Chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, is part of His Great Sermon on the Mount. Of course, the chapter and verse headings are arbitrary and we cannot take too much meaning from them. We can certainly take much meaning that His command comes within the context of the Sermon on the Mount. That gives us our best clue to enable us to follow his command.

The sermon on the Mount begins with the Beatitudes where the Lord begins by saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mat 5:3), and eight more verses that begin with “Blessed”, and describe the inner spiritual state of a spiritual person, who loves God above all things and follows the commandments. The word “blessed” can be simply translated as “happy”. This is not the kind of “happy” the person might have when they go to Disneyland but a deep contentment in the soul. Because the Holy Spirit abides in the soul, if a person is blessed that means that the Holy Spirit is present and enlightening him in all things. Every one of these attributes is not only a description of the blessed person, but also a command to us change our way of thinking and living.

The church dogmatically believes that it is possible for the soul to be blessed even when we are undergoing trials. This world is full of trials and full of evil, and no one can escape them. Therefore, all of the Lord’s promises to us – that we will be blessed or safe or taken care of – all apply to the soul being in a blessed state. This is the priority. Of course, the Lord knows that we need food and we need clothing and we need shelter and we need people to care for us, and He does provide these things. If these things are lacking however, the Christian should still be in a blessed state because the Holy Spirit is abiding in his heart.

The greatest key to be able to follow the Lord’s command and not think about tomorrow is to have the Holy Spirit abiding in us and for us to feel Him – His life, His warmth, His knowledge, His love.

Therefore, if we are worried about anything we must understand the root of the problem. It is not the thing that we are worried about; it is that our soul is still attached to earthly things, and passions, and it is ignorant regarding holy things and does not feel God as it should. The whole purpose of the Christian life is to become perfected so that we can have God abide in us and we can know Him and be united with Him and know all things that are true. This is a process, with many ups and downs.

One of the keys to a contented life is *simplicity*. Even secular people talk about this – getting rid of some of their possessions or not working so hard trying in order to have a big house or expensive car - people often call this “escaping the rat race”. Certainly, Christians should have a simplicity about them that does not crave material things or wealth or prestige, but the Lord also teaches them about another kind of simplicity in the “Our Father” (Matthew 6:9-15), which He teaches shortly after He tells us the Beatitudes.

What could speak about the “Our Father” for 100 years and not exhaust its theological depth, but in this context - being simple – it teaches that we should address God simply and confidently and in a certain kind of disposition. The disposition is that we recognize that our Father loves us and provides everything for us, and that we are inherently unworthy of His love but desire to love Him in some way that approaches worthiness.

Since we know God our Father loves us, we can ask for anything, and the “Our Father” asks for simple things. We ask for our daily bread, that is, the things we need to live, and we ask for forgiveness of our sins and help when we are tempted. The beginning part of the prayer is a kind of request as well, although it is not stated exactly as a request. We say: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”. This is not only a statement of what should be, but what we want to do, and we are asking help to do. Simply put, anything that is of God is good, anything that is not of God is not good, and we are asking God to help us to always choose good. If we have this simple way of evaluating things, we will not worry about tomorrow, because all we will be desiring is to be doing the things of God.

The “Sermon on the Mount” continues with many more teachings that help us to push out worry and substitute it with something else. For instance, we would not be worrying about earthly things if we follow the command:

“19. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: 20. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: 21. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. ” (Mat 6:19-21)

Many more examples abound, in this sermon, and all over the Scriptures, to teach us to change the things we value and strive for, and to learn the things that are good and the things that are bad, the things that bring life and the things that bring death. The person who knows these things will easily follow the advice:

“Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” (Mat 6:34)

Now let us look briefly what the Fathers think the meaning of this verse is. We have already looked at some of the context of the verse, which of course contributes to its meaning. After all this context the Lord basically tells us to be concerned about today and not tomorrow. According to blessed Theophylact, the term “the evil of the day” means “the crushing burden and pressure” (of each day). It is enough to care about the burdens of a single day and not to think about the potential problems tomorrow. We know from experience that if we continually think about the problems of tomorrow we are distracted and often cannot even solve the problems of the day. Blessed Theophylact also gives this advice:

“If you also take thought for tomorrow, and continually burden yourself for the sake of bodily things, when will you have time for God?”

This verse is a very good example of what is found throughout Scripture: we are commanded to do things and also taught how to achieve that which is commanded. We read the Scripture in order to learn the truth and know God and to change our behavior. This command of the Lord does not stand in isolation. Before He gives it, He tells us many things that we must do in order to achieve it.

I think Blessed Theofylact’s advice is what we must apply as often as we can if we are to be free of worry for tomorrow. We must make time for God. Time is a limited resource for us. If we use it for one thing we cannot use it for another. If we spend our time pursuing worldly things and worrying about them, then we will not be spending our time with God and for God.

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