

Barratt Ministries Challenge

Issue 45

Take No Thought For Tomorrow - Matthew 6:34

Maurice Barratt

“He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase; this is also vanity” (Ecclesiastes 5:10)

Why begin a study on “Take no thought for tomorrow” with this scripture? To remind us that in this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is still concerned with covetousness as the root problem we have to deal with. The reason Jesus says that we should take no thought for our lives, our food, our clothes, and our future, is because it is covetousness which leads us to take thought for those things.

In Colossians 3:5, Paul says that covetousness is idolatry, the worship of another god. Covetousness is the worship of mammon, and we cannot serve God and mammon, because mammon is a rival god. Just as “rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft”, so covetousness is as idolatry in God’s sight.

Seeking Which Future?

To take no thought for tomorrow does not mean that we should not think at all about the future or plan for it. Jesus doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t make a shopping list, or decide when to have a holiday, or plan to decorate the house. He means that we shouldn’t be anxious about the future, but more than that, he means that our care and concern should be somewhere else. Strangely enough, he says that our thoughts should be towards the future—but not our earthly future in this life. He says, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). You only seek what is in the future; you can’t seek what is in the past or the present. “The kingdom of God” will come in its fullness in the future; we pray for it every time we say the Lord’s Prayer. “His righteousness” will cover the earth in the future, when the kingdom comes. Now, we seek it; we “hunger and thirst” for it (Matthew 5:6).

The Best Pension

It’s natural to plan for the future; all over the world people are planning for their retirement, insuring against possible future accidents and loss, desperately trying to implement damage control against a wildly unpredictable future. Jesus tells us to take no thought for tomorrow in this life, but to take thought for the greatest event of our future: the return of Jesus in his kingdom. The best insurance and pension schemes in the world pale into insignificance beside the rewards and blessings inherited by the faithful disciples of Jesus in the kingdom.

Two Kingdoms

Just as there are two masters, God or Mammon, so there are two kingdoms: a “kingdom now” in this world, and the kingdom of God when Jesus returns. The world—and some Christians—seek their kingdom now, their riches now, their power now, blessing now, their glory and honour and reputation now. Jesus instructs his disciples to “pay now, live later”: “now the cross and conflict, then the perfect day”. We seek a kingdom to come. We also seek riches, power, blessing, glory, honour and status. There’s nothing wrong with that. It’s just that we seek those things in the future kingdom, not in this life. The choice is ours: either we lay up treasure on earth, or we lay it up in heaven. If we lay up treasure on earth and live for this life, our lives are dominated by covetousness and self-righteousness. If we lay up treasure in heaven and live for the kingdom, our lives are clothed in contentment and “his righteousness”.

I have four good reasons why it is wrong for us as Christians to take thought for tomorrow.

1. Tomorrow Never Comes.

The future does not exist. As soon as it arrives, it becomes the present; it is today, not tomorrow. It’s only in our imagination, in our thoughts. Jesus says “tomorrow will take thought for itself”. Thought is the only domain in which tomorrow exists. And if our thoughts are on tomorrow, we rob ourselves of time and opportunity in the present. If “procrastination is the thief of time”, anxiety about tomorrow is even more so.

A sizeable percentage of people live either in the past or the future. A man gets to work on Monday, and all he can talk about for the next two days is the previous weekend and the great time he had. Then half-way through the week he switches, and starts to look forward to the next weekend. “Roll on Friday!” His whole week has been spent in the past and the future. Some Christians are no different. Of course, they’re not thinking about getting drunk on the weekend—but they never stop talking about the revival that’s coming or the great event that’s coming up. Fine—but what about the present? Others are the opposite—they’re always going on about how things used to be in the good old days, the glory days. It’s just not the same now, those were great times ...

2. It’s A Command.

Jesus commands us not to take thought for tomorrow. So it’s rebellion and disobedience if we do. Of course we’re all susceptible to anxiety and we can all find ourselves thinking about the future, or the past. That’s only weakness. The point is that when we do find ourselves doing that, we should realise that it’s wrong and make a conscious decision and effort to not do so. Otherwise our lives will begin to revolve around concern for ourselves and our own future. It’s the spirit of independence that says, “I’ll run my own life the way I want to—I’ll control my future and decide my life.” And independence is idolatry, for slavery to self is only a form of slavery to the world, the flesh and the devil. In Philippians 4:6 Paul exhorts us to “be careful for nothing”—don’t be anxious about anything.

3. It Stops God From Providing For Us.

If we are controlling and taking care of every aspect of our life and future, God will not and cannot intervene in our lives. After all, we are declaring to him that we do not want him to. If we seek first his kingdom, and entrust our life, our future, our finances and our circumstances into his hands, we embark on a great adventure of faith, and we will see the miraculous provision of God time and time again. We will pass through times of trial, and our faith will be tested; but we are proving that God is our Father, and that we are true children of Abraham, the father of faith. Jesus chides us when we take thought for our future in this life: "O ye of little faith" (Matthew 6:30). Why? Because we are proving by our actions that we don't really trust God, we don't really have faith that he can provide for us, and we don't really believe in his kingdom and his righteousness.

Using Blessing Wisely

In Luke 12:19-21, Jesus told a parable about a man who was blessed financially and materially. That's great, but he did not use his wealth wisely. He was not "rich towards God". He looked instead to his own earthly future and built bigger barns for himself to provide for his retirement. He did not know that he had no earthly future left: that night "his soul was required". You don't know your future either; all the insurance and money in the world will not make the future any more predictable. What is certain is that you will appear at the judgement seat of Christ, to give account for every action you have taken, and your entry into the kingdom depends upon those actions. The foolish virgins were locked out of the wedding feast, despite the fact that they were virgins (Matthew 25:10-13); the servant who was given one talent was "cast into outer darkness" to face deep regret, even though he was a servant (Matthew 25:30); and Paul said (in 1 Corinthians 3) that how we build on the foundation of our salvation by grace is important and decisive; if we build (by our actions in this life) with gold, silver and precious stones, that is, with eternal values in mind, we will be rewarded in the kingdom; if we build with wood and hay and stubble, that is, with earthly values which will come to destruction, we will "suffer loss" (1 Corinthians 3:15). A great deal hinges on our attitudes and actions in this life.

Trapped By Riches

The rich young ruler who came to Jesus was presented with the choice. If he wanted to be perfect, he could sell all his earthly riches and give to the poor, and follow Jesus, who was seeking God's kingdom. He would have then known God's provision, and he would have traded his earthly riches for treasures in heaven. But he couldn't do it. He couldn't see past this life, he was trapped by covetousness and cares for his future in this world. He missed the greatest opportunity he ever had. Don't you miss it!

4. Today Has Enough Troubles.

It will take all our effort and concentration to live a holy life today, to live for the kingdom today. Living for the future kingdom demands action in the present. It's hard work, there are many conflicts and trials. It's "through much tribulation" that we enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). No man putting his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom. That means looking back to the past, and it applies to anxious care about the future as well. The cares of this life choke the seed, and cripple work for the kingdom. To work for God, you must free yourself of worldly cares as much as possible. That's the simple message.

Don't Do God's Job

"Tomorrow will take thought for itself" (Matthew 6:34). Don't do God's job for him. Your earthly future is God's business, so put it into God's hands. Don't lean to your own understanding, but acknowledge him in all your ways. Trust him with all your heart: he will direct your future (Proverbs 3:5,6). In Ecclesiastes 2:18-24, Solomon regretted that he would leave all his hard work to his descendants, who might be fools and squander it all. It all seemed so much vanity to him. He concluded that the best attitude was to do your work and enjoy it as you do it; not to think about the future, not to look back after you've done it and either gloat in pride or worry about what's going to happen to it. Solomon was right; planning for your future on earth is pure vanity; but planning for your future in God's kingdom is pure wisdom.

Experiences From Life

by Joanna Barratt

BEING HELPLESS CAN BE EXCITING!

A good maxim is to 'start off as you mean to go on', and most of us try to do this. But I suppose a better maxim would be 'mean to go on as you start off', for this is so much more difficult. We all started off right ... as vulnerable, dependent babies, relying on parents or guardians for every single thing. But the older we get the more independent we become, until in the majority of cases we regard any form of help as charity. preferring to solve problems and situations in our own way. For the worldly man, this attitude is usually regarded as good, it makes him a fighter, a survivor. But I think this is not how God intends Christians to think.

Sometimes I look at my cats and observe how content they are with food, a home and the occasional stroke. I'm sure they would fare much better in other homes where there are no little children trying to dress them up in dolls clothes or stick yoghurt cartons on their ears, but they never try to escape and are so peaceful, even when the children are playing really noisily, that they can sleep nearly all day. They have no worries.

The children also have no worries. When they are hungry they make sure I know about it, but they never worry about whether or not food will be in the cupboard, they expect I will come up with something. They have never once asked me whether we can afford to pay the bills for food, electricity, telephone, etc. they are secure in their trust that Maurice and I will look after them.

Solid Principles

It is good that we learn to take responsibility, and a good parent or guardian will make sure that their children are taught to do so. My parents did a very good job with me, for although I was only 16 years old when I left home. I made sure that out of my pittance of a wage I would pay my rent before I did anything else. I also knew that I had to pay my tithes to God otherwise I'd never be able to get through the week on what was left. I needed God to help me and so I decided that I would never rob Him no matter how short of money I was. God was very good to me. Although my attitude was bad when I first left home and was sacked from my first 5 or 6 jobs, God was with me and always found me work in time to pay my next weeks rent. Fortunately He also worked on my attitude so that He didn't have to keep bailing me out.

Someone Else's Responsibility

I remember the day I got married and the relief I felt that now someone else could take responsibility for me. In some ways I think it's great being a wife as it is reasonable to expect your husband to take care of you, which makes it easier to put your trust in God because you are already practising on your husband - or should be! It is not so easy for a man as from childhood he has been impressed that it is his role to take on the responsibility of a wife and family, and so he should, but where does that responsibility end? We have to play our part today, but tomorrow is God's concern.

A Valuable Lesson

Some years ago I learned a very valuable lesson. Maurice and I had a little 4-track recording studio, but we used the p.a. equipment and instruments in various venues as we travelled around. Because of this we took out a special (costly) musicians insurance which covered our equipment for anywhere in the UK. We had set up the equipment in a church, gone home for our dinner and when we came ready for the meeting in the evening found that it had all been stolen. Inconvenient for the night, but no problem because we were insured. Or so we thought. The man who had sold us the insurance was so desperate to make a sale that he had deceived us and had misquoted the small print to us. Thus the insurance company got out of the contract and we had nothing to show for our costly insurance premium. Immediately, I wrote off all insurance companies and classed them as legal rogues. But Maurice got the message - why put your trust in the world when you are serving God? He determined that we would never buy insurance again unless it was against the law not to, i.e. car insurance.

We have been tested on this decision many times, I wrote about our equipment being stolen a second time in my last article and showed that God allowed it to be taken so that he could redirect us both in our ministry. But we have had numerous thefts, and other lessons have been learned, yet we still maintain that no thief can come near us unless God allows them to. What would the outcome have been if Job, having been stripped of everything, had said, "No problem, wife, we are insured with the Abbey National. We can claim it all back, and we'll get better next time!?" God would not have been able to prove anything to Satan if Job had been insured by the world. We have to make ourselves vulnerable for God to be able to see what is in our heart.

Indulge - Or Shake It Off

When I was living in a flat and worked for a Temporary Services Bureau, they did not provide me with holiday or sickness benefit, which meant that I was only paid for the hours I worked. Christmas and bank holidays were a nightmare as I was forced to be out of work, and I couldn't afford to take holidays. I worked for the Bureau for about ten years and I can only remember taking one week of sick leave when God needed to teach me something which changed the whole course of my life. I often went to work feeling lousy and dreading the day, but by the time I'd got involved with my work, the sickness would be forgotten. I found out from experience that you can either indulge in your under-the-whether feelings, or shake them off by dwelling on something else. The Spirit of God can quicken your mortal flesh (Romans 8:11). I know that no sickness can come upon me unless God allows it, to either get my attention or teach me something, and so I have decided to put my complete trust in God.

Vaccination

For this reason Maurice and I have refused to allow our children to be vaccinated with any preventative medicines, and we don't give them antibiotics. I do take the children to the doctors if they are sick to find out what is wrong with them, but we don't give them anything other than Calpol as a rule, thus we allow them to build up their own resistance to sickness. When I was pregnant with my children I was amazed to learn that no matter what was wrong with me during my pregnancy I was not allowed to take any medication other than paracetamol as 'everything has side effects, Mrs. Barratt, and could harm the baby you are carrying'. One midwife told me that the remedy for high blood pressure, not that I suffered with this, was a period of fasting on water! The doctors were so anxious to protect the unborn baby, and yet they will give us whatever we ask for as a quick remedy without worrying about the possible consequences any side effects could have when we are not pregnant! Why put ourselves and our children at risk? And this is just another way of making ourselves vulnerable so that we can learn to put our trust in God.

Providing For The Future

Maurice and I live completely by faith. We have no income and live entirely by donations, and have done so for twenty years. We never make our needs public and never make appeals for funds - God

is our source. Yet we send our children to a private Christian School run by born again believers who work with us, as Christian parents, to maintain a consistent lifestyle for our children. We never have to face the threat of them being taught about other religions and false gods, no Halloween or Eid to combat, and certainly no worry of homosexual teachers, which is becoming a case for sex discrimination in our pro-gay city of Manchester now. Maurice and I have no little nest egg put to one side for our children. Instead we are providing for their futures now by investing our money in Christian education and daily opportunities to witness Gods wonderful provision.

Just recently we experienced a petrol crisis in our country and countless petrol stations ran out of fuel. Although Maurice travels many miles each week, he never had to cancel one meeting due to this problem. I don't do as many miles as him, but as I don't listen to the radio, have television or buy newspapers I was totally unaware of the situation and therefore was completely unprepared when the crisis occurred. Nevertheless, I prayed that God would look after us and that I would have enough petrol to take the children to and from school every day. After a few days my petrol gauge was really low and on my way to pick the children up I saw a queue of cars waiting to be served at a station which had received a supply of fuel. I drove up to the entrance only to be met by two policemen who informed me that the petrol was only for people who worked in emergency services, and advised me to just try to get home on what was in my tank.

"You're A Nurse!"

I picked up the children and headed for home praying audibly in front of them that God would not let the red petrol indicator go on until I could get petrol. The red light went on just as I approached the station I had passed previously, but this time there was no queue so I again pulled up to the entrance and was met by the same two policemen who immediately recognised me. 'I've seen you before!', one of them said as he came towards me. I apologised for coming again, but at there was no queue waiting I had presumed that it was all right to fill up my tank. He put his head in through the window to see how much fuel I had. Then, to my complete surprise he exclaimed, 'I know you, you're a nurse!' and beckoning to his companion he said, 'We know her, she's a nurse and has left her pass at home! Go on, love, tell them at the counter that we sent you!' I was amazed - so were the children who kept asking me if I was a nurse! Then Nathan, aghast, said, 'Wow mum, you only just prayed and God answered straight away!' But Izaak groaned laughingly, because school was not cancelled - God really had taken care of tomorrow ...