

Too worried to Be Thankful:
Community Thanksgiving Service
Romulus Methodist Church
23 November 2003

Text: Deuteronomy 8:1-3, 6-10, 17-20: “The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers.² And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. ³ And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. ⁶ So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him. ⁷ For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, ⁸ a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, ⁹ a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. ¹⁰ And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹⁷ Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ ¹⁸ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. ¹⁹ And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. ²⁰ Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.”

Matthew 6:25-33: “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Introduction

I don't worry: I become intensely concerned. I was intensely concerned about a football game yesterday, but Michigan pulled through and beat Ohio State. I wasn't intensely concerned about the Iron Bowl last night: I was despondent (Auburn won, 23-18).

Actually, I'm blessed. All I had to worry about yesterday — excuse me, be intensely concerned about — was whether the university library would let me check out the books I needed for my paper due after Thanksgiving. I didn't have to worry about going hungry, and chances are, neither did you. When we realize everything we've been given in our lives, we realize we have no reason to worry. Jesus promises to care for His children.

So why do we worry?

We're too blessed to worry.

In the Old Testament text tonight, Moses warned the Israelites about the adverse consequences of wealth. Deuteronomy is prophetic, telling Israel exactly what will happen for the duration of her history.

Moses warned the people that they would enter the land, conquer the inhabitants, become wealthy — and forget God. Sound familiar? In America, our ancestors entered the land, conquered the inhabitants, and today we're the wealthiest nation in the world. And, yes, we have forgotten God.

Since we have forgotten God, we have also forgotten His warnings and His promises. We like to spiritualize passages such as that from Matthew tonight. We say this passage doesn't apply to us, especially since none of us tonight were worried about eating.

Really?

For some of us tonight, the first question we had this morning was, "What will I wear to church today?" (For me, the first question was, "What's for breakfast?") As soon as the service ended this morning, the question was, "What will I wear to church tonight?" (For me, the question was, "What's for lunch?") Tomorrow, you will ask, "What will I wear to school, work, etc. today?" For me, the question will be — but you already know that.

We're so wealthy now, we ask these questions not because of their application to survival, but because they apply to status. Rather, we should thank God we have a choice of clothes to wear and food to eat. Do you know what most people in the world wore today? The same thing they wore yesterday. Do you know what most people in the world ate today? The same thing they ate yesterday.

We are far too blessed to worry about the cares of this world. cf v. 32: God knows what we need. We have allowed the culture to dictate our cares. James warns in his book that "friendship with the world is enmity with God." Rather than worry about the cares of the world, Jesus commands us to a higher calling:

Seek the kingdom of God.

v. 33. ζητεῖτε: desire to possess. We must diligently seek, desire, the kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God?

The phrase “kingdom of God” appears 67 times in the New Testament. Search the Internet for it, and you’ll get around 3.6 *million* hits. The kingdom is rather popular!

What is the kingdom? Well, first, what is isn’t:

The kingdom is not financial. It cannot be attained by free trade zones, and it cannot be bought. The kingdom is not political. I remember the Moral Majority of the 80’s. Jerry Falwell and Co. thought they could legislate the kingdom into existence if only they could elect enough of the right politicians. If the kingdom could be bought or legislated, it would be worthless. The Church conquered the Roman Empire without benefit of wealth or political assistance.

So what is the kingdom?

cf. John Wesley, “The Way to the Kingdom”:

We are, First, to consider the nature of true religion, here termed by our Lord, "the kingdom of God." The same expression the great Apostle uses in his Epistle to the Romans, where he likewise explains his Lord's words, saying, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." (Rom. 14:17.)

Not in any *outward thing*; such as *forms*, or *ceremonies*, even of the most excellent kind.... The religion of Christ rises infinitely higher, and lies immensely deeper, than all these.... Let no man dream that they have any intrinsic worth; or that religion cannot subsist without them. This were to make them an abomination to the Lord.

I say of *the heart*.... This alone is religion, truly so called: This alone is in the sight of God of great price. The Apostle sums it all up in three particulars, "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." And, First, *righteousness*. We cannot be at a loss concerning this, if we remember the words of our Lord, describing the two grand branches thereof, on which "hang all the law and the prophets;" "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength: This is the first and great commandment;" (Mark 12:30;) the first and great branch of Christian righteousness.... And the second commandment is like unto this; the Second great branch of Christian righteousness is closely and inseparably connected therewith; even, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." *Thou shalt love*, -- thou shalt embrace with the most tender good-will, the most earnest and cordial affection, the most inflamed desires of preventing or removing all evil, and of procuring for him every possible good, -- *Thy neighbour*; -- that is, not only thy friend, thy kinsman, or thy acquaintance; not only the virtuous, the friendly, him that loves thee, that prevents or returns thy kindness; but every child of man, every human creature, every soul which God hath made....

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Once we seek the kingdom, what happens then?

All these things will be added unto you.

The Greek actually says this. Does it mean it? Does it mean that seeking the kingdom will give us all the stuff?

I have a feeling that those who truly seek the kingdom — those who truly desire to possess it — will learn that the things of the world will seem a little less desirable.

In 1918, Helen Howarth Lemmel was given a tract by a missionary friend. As she read it, Helen’s attention was focused on this line: “So then, turn your eyes upon Him, look full into His face, and you will find that the things of earth will acquire a strange new dimness.” She wrote the hymn, *Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus*:

O soul, are you weary and troubled?

No light in the darkness you see?

There's a light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free!

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

Those who seek the kingdom find themselves seeking less of the world and more of Christ.

Conclusion

This week, I have made a difficult decision regarding my time in school. In spite of the financial difficulties it will entail, I have decided to drop 2 classes next semester and spend an additional semester in school so I can devote more time to my ministry. I've sensed God leading me to this decision for a while now. I've always wondered — and been intensely concerned — and worried — about how I'll pay for it. But I remember — when I surrendered to the call to seminary — that God provided in miraculous ways for us. I know what I'm saying when I tell you, don't be so worried about the future that you fail to be thankful for the present.

Colossians 2:6-7: Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Walk in Christ Jesus the Lord; let God handle your needs; and walk in Thanksgiving.

In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

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But true religion, or a heart right toward God and man, implies happiness as well as holiness. For it is not only "righteousness," but also "peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

This holiness and happiness, joined in one, are sometimes styled, in the inspired writings, "the kingdom of God," (as by our Lord in the text,) and sometimes, "the kingdom of heaven." It is termed "the kingdom of God," because it is the immediate fruit of God's reigning in the soul. So soon as ever he takes unto himself his mighty power, and sets up his throne in our hearts, they are instantly filled with this "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." It is called "the kingdom of heaven" because it is (in a degree) heaven opened in the soul. For whosoever they are that experience this, they can aver before angels and men,

Everlasting life is won,

Glory is on earth begun, according to the constant tenor of Scripture, which everywhere bears record, God "hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son" (reigning in his heart) "hath life," even life everlasting.