

CRYING IN THE CHAPEL

AND OTHER MESSAGES

by

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CHAPTER SIX

THE FOOLISH FARMER

“And he spake a parable unto them, saying, 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, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (Luke 12:16-20).

This is a picture of a man who thought that he was an owner; he was mistaken. He was not an owner, but a steward. He had trained himself to look in every direction except up. He had not learned that his prosperous harvest was not of his own making alone. He didn't give God thanks for the sunshine that made growth in the plant possible. He had not placed the minerals in the ground, and he had not ordered the rain, or been the author of the moisture that made for a bumper crop. This world is filled with such ingratitude! A thankless heart is the worst crime against God. You remember Shakespeare made King Lear to say, “How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child.” If man despises ingratitude, how this condition must hurt the heart of God.

The Lord does not condemn the man for being diligent and having a good harvest. God is no champion of failure. The man is to be commended for being diligent and astute. No mention is made that the man had wasted his substance in riotous living, as it was in the case of the prodigal son. The man must have been a good moral man, but there are other forms of human badness. An ungrateful and independent spirit may be more sinful than immoral conduct. God called him a fool, even though the world might have called him clever, because the man had lost the real genius for living.

I can see the wealthy farmer pacing up and down the front porch of his palatial home. The servants have finished their work; they are calmly resting. They have nothing to worry about. But the rich man is saying, “What shall I do? What shall I do?” He has no place to bestow his goods and his fruits. Notice that he doesn't think about his neighbor. He could have said, “I know what I will do with my surplus. I will give part of it to my neighbor who has been having a hard time. I will give part of it to the widow with all those children to support.”

He didn't think about God or about his fellowman. An insane man may be beside himself, but this man was inside himself.

Finally he falls upon a good plan. He will tear down the barn and build a larger one. I can see him rushing into his house to draw blueprints for the new barn. He constructs the plans late into the night and when he has finished his plans, he hears a knock on the door. He inquires, "Who is it?" The voice replies, "I am Death. I have come for your soul." The man says, "Go away. I'm busy drawing blueprints for my new barn." But Death is not interested in our future plans. The door opens and the grim reaper moves in. The man clutches his heart and slumps to the floor. Excited servants rush in and summon the family doctor. The man is dead. Send for the coroner and be sure that the inscription on the tombstone reads, "**Thou Fool.**"

I know that when the Lord said, "**This night is thy soul required of thee,**" He was referring to physical death. But there could be a secondary meaning in that statement. It could also mean that the man who loses the attitude of gratitude has lost his soul. Christ seems to say, "When you are unwilling to realize that a bumper crop is not of your own making and you refuse to give thanks to the God who made it possible, you have no right to house a soul in that sensual body. You are no longer a real person; you have become matter in motion. Your soul is required of you; you don't deserve to have it."

If that be true, we have lots of soulless people walking around. They have traded the Spirit for matter, and that is a bad bargain. That is why Jesus said, "**What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?**" But I want you to notice that the main lesson to be learned from this parable is that the man was not prepared. It seems that he was caught off guard. In spite of bumper crops and successful harvests, the man is not ready for some of the major projects of life. I want you to see that he was not prepared for life, he was not prepared for death, and therefore he was not prepared for eternity.

I. HE WAS NOT PREPARED FOR LIFE

The bumper crop created a problem. The man had to worry and reason within himself about what to do with the surplus. He was not ready to live. He had forgotten that life is not acquiring material things. Life is made up of better stuff than that. But the man was all clay; he had no sky in his life. Had he known the meaning of life, the surplus would have posed no problem. He could have seen the need around him. His heart could have been made happy at the prospect of using this new gain to make glad the hearts of others. But he was not ready, so he withdraws to contemplate with his poor heart about what he is to do. Such people always do the wrong thing. They live for themselves and to themselves.

Now no one can blame the man with not being smart. A great deal of good can be said in his favor. Surely he was an intelligent man. It takes that kind of person to raise a bumper crop. We are not censuring the man for lack of common sense. Every transaction, physical and mental and moral, should be undergirded with wisdom.

A young artist came to the home of a seasoned painter to view some of his work.

The young man, amazed by the beauty of the work, asked the old professional, "What do you mix your colors with?" The seasoned veteran answered, "Brains." This is an essential ingredient in making any life wholesome. It is not the only ingredient. Some of the philosophers, like Socrates, said that happiness is knowledge. They were only partly right. We need more than just a head in this tough job of living. We need heart as well.

It is possible for a man to know how to make a living and not know how to make a life.

- A man may know a great deal about one thing and know nothing about other things.
- A man may know a great deal about engineering, and nothing about medicine.
- A man may know much about science, and nothing about religion.

Human reason is not enough. There are other sides to life. The poet was making fun of the common concept that scientific knowledge is absolute and final when he said,

What was our trust we trust not,
What was our faith we doubt,
Whether we must or must not,
We may debate about.

The soul perhaps is a gust of gas,
And wrong is a form of right,
But we know that energy equals mass,
By the square of the speed of light.

What we have known we know not,
What we have proved abjure,
Life is a tangled bow knot,
But this one thing is sure.

Come little lad, come little lass,
Your simple creed recite;
We know that energy equals mass
By the square of the speed of light.

The man was not prepared to live because he was living purely on the material level. Everything was interpreted on the level of the visible. He was concerned in food and clothes and barns and material increase. I heard a Preacher say about this man that "he cared more for beef roast than he cared for the Holy Ghost." The spiritual basis which forms the biggest part of a man's life went unnoticed. Money was everything to him. No one will deny that money serves its purpose in human life. Jesus said much about money, but He did not condemn it. He sought to guide men in the proper discharge of it. They say that money talks. Well, it says good-by to me! You have heard the old saying, "You can't take it with you." I guess not. It goes before you do. I heard of a man who said, "If I can't take it with me, I refuse to go." The man will go anyhow. He does not have the power of life in his hands.

A man is not prepared to live if he leaves God out of his life. Our modern civilization does not realize that God is an essential part of human life. Man was made for God and he will not find peace and happiness in life until he anchors himself in God. A human being needs God like the lungs need oxygen and like fish need the water. How foolish it would be for a growing plant to refuse the sun. The sun is its very existence, and God is essential for man. I cannot see how the man in the story could leave God out. He was a farmer. Jesus loved the farmer. He used many illustrations from the farm in His discourses. Some of the best folks I know are farm people. They are thrifty, hard working people. There is something about plowing and sowing and waving fields of corn and blooming flowers, cotton and wheat, that tell the story of the Creator. This man had seen the hand of God at work. It is difficult for a farmer to be an atheist. Yet this man had eliminated God from his geography.

Life is not made up of material things alone.

- Money can never take the place of God.
- Money does not console in the hour of distress.
- Money does not dry the tears of the bereaved and brokenhearted.
- Money does not wipe clouds out of human skies.
- This man did not have money; money had him.
- He didn't own the farm; the farm owned him.

Two women stood by the coffin of a rich man. One said to the other, "How much did he leave?" The other one replied, "He left all." And so he did. Our needs are very small in the hour of death. Just one suit and a small piece of real estate is all that death requires.

It is said that Alexander the Great made a request concerning his death. He said, "I don't care how expensive the coffin. I want you to make two holes in it and stick my hands out so that as I pass down the street the people will know, that even though I ruled and owned the world, I am going out empty-handed."

Billy Sunday was addressing the leading businessmen in the city of New York during his crusade there during World War I. In his own brusque way, he shocked the businessmen by telling them, "You can't take your gold with you. If you did, what good would it do you? It would melt anyway!" He knew where most of them were going. How foolish for a man to live only for material things. For that very reason this man in the story was not prepared for life. And so many in our day sacrifice everything for a bit of material gain. They sacrifice love and time with their children and health. They spend their health and strength making money, and then they spend their money trying to get their health and strength back.

II. HE WAS NOT PREPARED FOR DEATH

He was busy drawing blueprints for the new barns when the bony hand of Death knocked on the door. Previously he had been telling himself how he was now prepared to enjoy the fruits of his labors. But then come the words, "**This night! This night is thy soul required of thee.**"

One can sense that the man was not prepared for death. It follows naturally that no man is prepared to die who is not prepared to live, and no man is prepared to live unless he has received Christ as Saviour and Guide of his life. His faulty concept of life had made him presumptuous. Because he seemingly owned the barns and the fruits, he thought that he owned life. He thought that he could dictate to his soul and set the boundaries of his existence. But he was looking at the wrong clock. His clock said, "**Many years.**" God's clock said, "**This night.**"

The man did not realize that his days were numbered. He thought that if he could score a victory in the material realm that he could forestall death. The National Press Association was holding a banquet a few years ago in the famous Trocadero in London. A toast was proposed by a man who was well known for his skeptical and scornful attitude toward religion. "You have heard it said," he smiled, "**'Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we may die.'** But I say, 'Eat, drink, and be merry for today we live!'"

No sooner had he proposed this toast than he seized his heart. They carried him out and thirty minutes later he had died. Two days later they put him to bed with a shovel.

Oh, my friends, this matter of living and dying is serious business. Life is not a joke on this side of the grave and it is not a joke on the other side. Constantly we are warned to live in a state of preparation.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that it is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment. James informs us, "**What is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.**" The writer of Ecclesiastes describes man's downward journey in the twelfth chapter. The time will come when the silver cord is loosed and the golden bowl is broken, and the pitcher broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern. God help us to be ready and not to be caught unprepared as it was in the case of the man in the parable!

We must realize that life is connected at every point. Bob Ingersoll taught his followers to exclaim, "One world at a time." But we are living in various worlds at the same time. It is not right to attend to one facet of our living and disregard the rest. Eternity and death are to be remembered as we journey through life. But we want everything right now. We are not willing to wait. We sacrifice the eternal upon the altar of the temporary.

Are you prepared to die? If it would happen now, could you say, "I am prepared to meet God"? Think soberly on this matter. Death is just around the corner for most of us. There are some reading these words who will not see another Christmas. From where you sit, there are a hundred roads that lead to the cemetery. We have been told that more people die with their clothes on than die in bed.

They die of accidents on the highway; they die in war; they die of industrial accidents. Heart attacks and strokes and accidents at play are all roads that lead to the cemetery. There is hardly any room to turn around between the cradle and the grave. The wood of the one almost touches the marble of the other. God help us to submit our fragile soul to the safekeeping of Christ who is eager at this moment to take us unto Himself and redeem us forever.

David was conscious of the brevity of life when he said in the Psalms, “**Life is like a tale that is told.**” This refers to an ancient custom in that day. Every court had an expert storyteller. You can imagine that King David had the best that could be secured. The members of the court would gather and the storyteller would relate some exciting tale. On this particular occasion, perhaps, he told a breathtaking story that excited and charmed the listeners. David was among the ones who listened with keen interest. He saw how the story began, and continued to a rousing climax and then tapered to a finish. The members of the court retired to their chambers. David reflected upon the story and thought to himself, “Life is like that story. It has a beginning; it rises to a climax, and then is finished in death.” Yes, at its best, life is very brief. It pays to be ready.

III. THE MAN WAS NOT PREPARED FOR ETERNITY

This is not all there is to life; this life is part of man. Eternity is the rest of him. The poet was right when he said,

Tell me not in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream,
And the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real, and life is earnest;
And the grave is not its goal.
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

It isn't all of life to live nor all of death to die. Death is not the finish of the sentence; it is just a semi-colon, then it continues into the endless cycles of eternity. It is this other existence beyond the grave that makes this life so important. Time is the womb of eternity. Death is not death, it is birth into foreverness.

Everyone of us spent nine months in the body of a mother preparing an organism to live for seventy years. Then one day we left the womb and were born. Leaving the womb was actually death to one type of existence and birth to another. So now we are gestating in the womb of time preparing a life that will exist forever. So death is birth; we are born forever. What a sobering thought. With this reality in mind, man should expend every effort in making this life a state of preparation to embark upon the eternal journey which awaits every individual beyond the shore of time. Man was not made to live and die. He was made for God and he is incomplete and useless until he links himself with the Infinite. The synthesis, however, is impossible without the death of Christ, which fuses the finite man to the infinite God.

Do you realize this, my friend? This life is not all of you, but only a very small part. God has made you for eternity. Man is the only creature with whom God wants to associate forever. Lower orders live and die and serve their purpose by becoming meat and sustenance for the highest members of the created world.

That is why Jesus died for man. He did not die for fish or birds or beasts of the field. He died for you, to espouse your sins and take them away so that God could find a basis whereby He might bring us unto Himself without becoming lawless. The death of Christ was essential for us, but — I say it reverently — it was essential for God. God, as powerful as He is, could never save us without the death of Jesus. He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Through Jesus, God becomes just and the justifier of them that believe in Him.

Eternity is made relevant and palatable through this divine provision. He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. Jesus, in whom dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead bodily, took our shame and our blame, took our stain and our pain, and became sin for us that we might be saved once and for all and forever. Just a simple step will bring you into communion with God forever. You can be prepared for eternity by receiving Christ as Saviour and Lord of your life. I urge you to do it today.

I heard the story about a young minister who went to a country town to preach every Sunday. He met a wealthy infidel in the town, who vexed Christians with his satire and invective. He said to the young minister, “I want to show you something.” He took him to a high elevation on his property and showed him his achievements. He said, “I own everything you see in that direction,” as he pointed to the north. “I own everything that you see in that direction,” and that, and that as he pointed south, east, and west. “I plant on Sunday, harvest on Sunday, and yet I have more than my Christian neighbors put together. How do you explain that?”

The young minister said, “You have pointed north, east, west, and south, and you inform me that you own everything in that direction. Let me ask you one question — how much do you own in that direction?” and the young minister pointed toward heaven. The wealthy unbeliever raised his head to heaven and dropped it and said, “I don’t own anything in that direction.”

“What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul!”

When you were born, you began life with a cry. But when you cried, others smiled. It meant life. The doctor smiled, the nurses smiled, the father smiled. So live by the help of Christ that when you come to die, you will smile, and others will weep.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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