

"Thou Fool"
"O, YE OF LITTLE FAITH!"
LUKE CHAPTER TWELVE

LUKE 12 is very useful in helping us to determine whether we are with the few on the very narrow path of life, or if we are with the vast hordes on the way of death. It contains some of the most searching and enlightening teachings and commands of Christ. It is perhaps best summed up in two words of verse 20: *"Thou fool!"*

In return for renouncing this life and giving ourselves wholly to God, we are promised endless joys far beyond our capacity to conceive; and yet we continue, like mindless infants, to play with tiddly-winks. It is absurd, and it is pitiful.

This chapter is an attempt to shake us out of this stupidity, into wisdom and reality.

"He began to say unto his disciples, First of all beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (v. 1).

Hypocrisy: pretending, make-believe, false appearance. There keeps coming back to mind those two tragic cases of folly with which the Mosaic and Christian dispensations begin:

In the midst of a great work for God, greedy and small-minded Achan thought he could steal and hide and use for himself that which was God's.

And Ananias and Sapphira, in a time of glorious unity of fellowship and unselfishness, *"kept back part of the price."*

"Thou fool!"—to think that you can outwit God—to think that you can ignore the rules and still receive the prize. ***"Thou FOOL!"***

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"For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed: neither hid, that shall not be known" (v. 2).

We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and we shall leave that place either in shame, or in glory and joy.

Every act of our lives today must be measured against that one great moment of truth. The issues are so vast that any act today that does not contribute to success at that time is obviously utter stupidity: *"Thou fool!"*

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"Be not afraid of them that kill the body ... but fear Him who can cast into Gehenna." (v. 4-5).

Much of natural life is based upon fear of, and dependence upon, natural man. The idea is broader than just fear as such, but encompasses dependence, reliance, trust. The point is: depend wholly and exclusively on GOD, Who alone has power to preserve and to destroy.

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Arising directly from this is one of the most remarkable and thought provoking statements of all Scripture (v. 6)—

"Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings?—and not one of them is forgotten before God."

What a momentous revelation of the character and infinity of God! Of all the millions and millions of sparrows that so briefly come and go in the great cycle of life, not one—not one—is forgotten before God!

Our puny minds think in measures and limits. God is measureless and limitless. If God had limits, He wouldn't be God.

We worry faithlessly about our health, and our livelihood, and our puny little rubbishy possessions; yet God is watching every sparrow! Peter says—

"Cast all your care upon Him."

Note the *"cast,"* and note the *"all."*

Cast it—throw it—get rid of it—forget it—get it out of your mind. Don't just lay it there gingerly, still holding on with one hand, waiting apprehensively to see if it will be taken care of. Throw it there and turn your back on it.

And ALL of it. A part won't work. To hold back part of our cares is just like holding back part of the price. It is lack of faith. If we want God to handle our affairs, we must turn ALL our problems over to Him, and concern ourselves solely with getting on with HIS work.

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"Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God" (v. 8).

This is directly related to the previous consideration—fear of man or of God. And confessing Christ publicly is not just verbal testimony, not just one aspect of life—it is a complete way of life.

Everything we do or say must be a confession before men of our allegiance to Christ and his way of holiness and wisdom. We must publicly and obviously radiate that fact, even to the point of appearing—in the eyes of the wicked world—as foolish, fanatical and extreme. There are many ways we can deny Christ. Any neglect or violation of his commands is denying him before men—treading him under foot—taking sides against him. His commands are many, and contrary to all fleshly "common sense," and we stand absolutely no chance at all of keeping them if we do not constantly study and meditate upon them—

"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him. Neither CAN he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cr. 2:14).

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"Unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven" (v. 10).

Is it possible to come under this irrevocable, unforgivable condemnation today? That is not a profitable question. It is like saying, "If I jump off this cliff, shall I be able to climb back up?"

Why even consider such childish stupidity? The profitable course to take is to ask, What is the principle here? What is the warning? What is the lesson for our guidance? What are the dangers to be avoided?

The big lesson appears to be this—

Whenever we complain about anything, whenever we are unhappy or dissatisfied with anything, we are going in a dangerous direction, we are playing with fire and disaster.

We are told that all our affairs are under the loving dispensation of the Spirit of God—that *"all things work together for good,"* and are for a wise purpose in our training and development as children of God, and that it is our duty to patiently learn the wisdom these things teach.

Whenever, therefore, we do not accept all events and circumstances in cheerful faith and thanksgiving, we are setting our face in the direction of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit of God, and that path leads only to irrevocable death.

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"When they bring you before powers, take no thought what ye shall say; for the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that same hour" (v. 11).

Peter says (1 Pt. 3:15): *"Be ready—(that implies previous preparation)—*

"Be prepared, be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you, a reason of the hope that is in you."

And Paul said to Timothy—

"Give attendance to reading; meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them" (1 Tm. 4:13-15).

These commands all go together, and explain each other.

God's assurance of guidance depends wholly upon our giving ourself ENTIRELY to His Word and work.

He has put it all in His inspired Book of Life. He will help us find it and understand it and remember it—IF we will *"give ourselves wholly to it."* "Wholly" is the key. We must put it first in our lives at all times: *"Seek ye first."*

We may have, with great and self-satisfying effort, worked the things of God all the way up to 2nd place in our lives, and we may thereby feel a great sense of accomplishment.

But 2nd is no good at all. It might just as well be 102nd. It must be first, or nothing.

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"Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me" (v. 13).

Here was a man in deep trouble who came to Christ for help.

Christ spoke of justice and fairness one with another. Here was a man cheated out of his inheritance by a wicked brother, and he appealed for Christ's help that justice might be done. All he asked was fairness.

Why then did Christ rebuff him so sharply and strongly? Why not at least condemn the selfish brother and speak out for justice?

The answer is very revealing, and out of it comes that parable whose heart and lesson is summed up in those two words: *"Thou fool!"*

"Thou fool! A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

Possessions are baby's toys, rubbish, dung, a burden, thick clay. How hard a lesson to learn, until it is too late to do us any good in living our life sensibly!—

"Master, my brother has taken my marbles and my rattle! Make him give them back!"

Christ came to speak and teach about REAL things, eternal things, grown-up things; things that have value and meaning and purpose and glorious, endless futurity.

Christ came to try to lift men's puny little minds out of the passing rubbish of this present brief vale of tears—

"Thou fool! This night thy soul shall be required of thee: THEN whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

What can they do for you then—except to rise up to expose and condemn your hoarding lust and greed—at a time when you need help most, as you stand at the judgment seat to give an account of your stewardship of GOD'S GOODS that He has entrusted you with to be used exclusively in HIS service?

What a great and terrible day of reckoning there is soon to come upon the Household of God!

"So is he that layeth up treasure for himself" (v. 21).

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Then he goes on to drive the lesson home to those who PROFESS to follow him and PROFESS to love his commands—

"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat: neither for the body, what ye shall put on."

Truly people have to eat, and people have to dress; and it is desirable that food be enjoyable and nourishing, and dress adequate and suitable.

But these things are very secondary and minor things in the great purpose of life—not the major things the animal world makes of them. They must be taken care of as quickly and simply as possible, and then the mind and energies must be turned to the real, important, eternal things.

Christ strongly warns his people about two deceptive dangers in this connection that can lead to failure and death—

1. Interest in and wasted attention upon these things—the passing things of the present—instead of concentrating all our attention upon our spiritual learning and development.

2. Concern and worry about these things instead of having complete, trusting, childlike faith in God Who feeds the ravens and so gloriously clothes the lilies—

"Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap: neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them" (v. 24).

Jesus is not teaching lazy improvidence, under the guise of faith. Paul says, speaking equally by the inspiration of the same Spirit—

"If a man will not work, neither shall he eat.

"He that provideth not for his own household is worse than an infidel."

Work is the whole purpose of our lives. Work—useful, purposeful, productive activity—is the very essence of true life itself. *"Always abounding in the work of the Lord"* is the only way given whereby we may attain to life—

"WORK out your salvation in fear and trembling."

The whole issue is as to WHAT work we devote our lives to, and what its purpose is.

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"Which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?" (v. 25).

The thought clearly is—not as would appear from the Authorized Version, adding two feet to our height, which surely could not be spoken of as *"the thing which is least"*—but rather extending our life by even the briefest of periods.

The word translated "stature" is translated "age" in the expression, *"He is of age"* (Jn. 9:21); and again in Heb. 11:11: *"She was past age."*

The "cubit" was proverbially used in this connection of something very small, as meaning, "You cannot extend your life even one more step." David said (Ps. 39:5)—
"Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth."

Truly we can do things which shorten our lives, and we can do things which lengthen our lives, and it is our duty to use wisdom in this respect, but always subordinate to the issue of usefulness to God, which always takes priority.

Paul could, for example, have doubtless lengthened his life by avoiding the labors and abuses and hardships and beatings and sleeplessnesses that he endured, but he considered the work of God more important than mere physical well-being.

But in the obvious sense in which Jesus speaks here we cannot add one second to our life when the time comes for God to take our breath, so why be concerned with lesser things?

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"If God so clothe the grass, how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith!" (v 28).

That is us—the best of us—ALL of us—

"O ye of little faith!"

Faith is the great thing to be developed in us all—a life whose every action and decision testifies that all our trust and dependence rests on the direct daily care of God, and not on ourselves.

There is only one way that saving, God-pleasing faith can be developed and maintained—

"FAITH COMETH BY HEARING, AND HEARING BY THE WORD OF GOD."

This blunt statement of Jesus: *"O ye of little faith!"*—with those other two words, forms the essence of this chapter—

"Thou fool! ... O ye of little faith!"

"For all these things—food and raiment—protection—security—comfort—do the nations of the world seek after; and your Father KNOWETH that ye have need of these things.

"But rather seek ye the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you."

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V. 33: *"Sell that ye have, and give alms."*

Let us pause and consider this very striking command—

"Sell that ye have, and give alms."

This is not one of those passages where we read in the margin "Some ancient authorities word this a little differently." No one doubts or questions that this is the original text.

This is not one of those passages where we must look up how the words are used elsewhere, to try to figure out what is meant. They are all plain, simple, common words, none over four letters.

This is not one of those passages where we have to go to lexicons and commentaries to try to find an explanation. The simplest among us can clearly understand this command, IF WE WANT TO.

Some day, and it looks like it will be soon, we shall be asked, publicly in front of everyone, just what we understand that command to mean, and to what extent we allowed it to motivate

and transform our lives from natural animal, to spiritual—

"Sell that ye have, and give alms: provide yourselves a treasure in the heavens."

It just might be a good idea to start planning NOW as to what answer we shall make, for upon the convincingness of our explanation in that day will depend whether we hear. *"Thou fool!"* or *"Come ye blessed of my Father."*

"We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to GIVE AN ACCOUNT of what we have done"

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"For where your treasure is there will your heart be also."(v.34).

It is good that he added that. And the more we consider it, the more true we realize it to be. Truly the command itself is sufficient, to test our faith and our obedience, but the explanation adds greatly to the incentive.

Wherever our treasure is, there our heart and attention is bound to be. If it is on earth, it will inevitably pull our minds down to earth, and rob us of eternal life.

If we are careful and diligent to transfer our treasure to the Bank of Heaven in the way Christ prescribes, as soon as it comes to our hand, then we shall find our heart and our attention strongly drawn upward as by a great and irresistible magnet.

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"Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning."

Figurative language, but with a clear and obvious meaning. "Loins girded" means awake, alert, and prepared for immediate action. "Lights burning" means the lamps of knowledge not only filled with the Spirit oil, but in the active state of radiance and illumination, both for our own path, and to attract and guide others.

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"And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord."

We are told, here and in other places, that the moment of Christ's coming will be sudden and unexpected; and some will be ready, and others not.

We are told that much depends on just how that moment catches us—prepared or unprepared—watching, or off guard.

Not because our chance state at any particular moment would be the determining factor—that would be just like a game of chance—but because our state of readiness at that time will be the key to our whole life.

Some will tire, lose interest, relax, be temporarily diverted. With some, the keen edge of ardent expectation will be dulled by luxury or prosperity or simply the force of custom or habit. With some it won't happen to be Sunday morning when the call comes, and therefore their minds will be far away on other things.

But those who truly love will become more eager, more alert, more watchful with each passing day, knowing and rejoicing that each day brings them one day closer to that joyful time on which their heart is fixed. That great day will not catch THEM with their minds on other, rubbishy things.

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"That when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him IMMEDIATELY."

"Immediately": that is the vital word there. There must be no hesitation or looking back—no last minute scurrying to put neglected things in order, or to fill neglected lamps.

Jesus' point is that, to please him, there must be a constant looking forward to that moment; a constant, instant readiness to go, like a runner on his mark, alert for the starter's gun.

It is so fatally easy to get things around our neck that distract from that readiness.

The approved will be those, and ONLY those, who are so thrilled and overwhelmed with the greatness of that promised time that nothing else matters very much to them at all.

They will find it hard to get their minds on present things, even to the point of taking care of obvious necessities. They will be ready and watching because the very intensity of their love and zeal and faith will make any other condition impossible, especially in these last terrible but wonderful days of swiftly fulfilling prophecy.

But what if we just do not have and cannot arouse that burning intensity of faith?—

"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the WORD OF GOD."

This prescription for giving health and robustness to feeble faith is clear, and the cure is divinely guaranteed. There will be no excuses accepted in that great day if we have neglected the prescribed treatment for our fleshly corruptions and infections.

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Jesus' closing remarks in this chapter may appear somewhat obscure, but they are obviously a serious and urgent warning, and therefore meant to be understood and attended to—

"When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, as thou art in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him, lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison.

"I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence till thou hast paid the very last mite" (vs. 58-59).

Here, this follows the condemnation of the hypocritical nation of Israel that could recognize the signs of the weather but could not discern the great time that had come upon them in the visitation of God's Son.

In Mt. 5:25, the same warning occurs in another context. It there follows the instruction to be reconciled to our brother before making offering to God.

In one case the warning appears more national in its application, in the other more individual; but in each case the principle is the same. It speaks of an Adversary who has the ultimate power to judge and punish, and it warns us to make peace with Him while opportunity remains, before the final issue is joined and it is too late.

If we fail to arrange a settlement and the case is carried to court, we are lost; for THERE we can only get justice, and what we must have to escape condemnation is mercy.

We have seen how, nationally, Israel failed to make their peace with the judicial Adversary, and how the judgment day came by the Roman armies. And how, for 2,000 terrible years, they have paid in blood to the last mite.

The context in Matthew, the more individual application, introduces another aspect—

As we judge, so shall we be judged.

If we judge others charitably and sympathetically, seeking to understand and to help rather

than condemn, we ourselves shall be so judged.

If we judge suspiciously and condemningly, we ourselves shall be judged suspiciously and condemningly.

As we drive hard bargains in natural things, so shall we be treated in spiritual things.

As we glory in mercy and forgiveness and liberality and returning good for evil, and imputing no evil, so shall it be done to us in the day of final account when we shall need every measure of mercy and forgiveness we can get—

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over.

"With the same measure that ye mete, withal it shall be measured to you again."

We each, by our treatment and judgment of others, set the pattern of our own judgment. How few, how few, have the wisdom to put aside the flesh and walk in the way of life!

—G.V.Growcott, *The Berean Christadelphian*, February, 1971