

On the Thorns in the Parable

by Thomas Reade

The sermon warns against the dangers of worldly cares, riches, and pleasures, and calls the listener to covet the best gifts and seek eternal life.

Scripture: Psalm 18:2, Proverbs 3:5, Ecclesiastes 2:10, Matthew 6:19, Luke 8:14, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Galatians 5:22, Philippians 4:8, 1 Timothy 6:10, Hebrews 13:5

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Worldly Temptation"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches on the parable of the sower, explaining how worldly cares, riches, and pleasures act as thorns that choke the growth of the word of God in our hearts. He emphasizes the importance of trusting in the Lord, casting our burdens upon Him, and seeking refuge in His protection. Reade warns against the deceitfulness of riches, highlighting how the love of money can lead to spiritual downfall. He also cautions against pursuing worldly pleasures that distract us from God and urges believers to find true joy in communion with God, serving others, and engaging in activities that glorify Him.

Transcript

50. ON THE THORNS IN THE PARABLE

In the instructive parable of the sower, our divine Redeemer, who spoke as never man spoke, has discovered to us the nature of those thorns which choke and render unfruitful the good seed of the word of God. "The thorny ground represents those who hear and accept the message, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life. And so they never grow into maturity." Luke 8:14. WORLDLY CARES are thorns. If we are anxious and troubled about many things; anxious about the events of tomorrow, and forecasting evils which have no existence but in our own minds, we are sowing tares and thorns, which must of necessity destroy all the vigor and fruitfulness of the Gospel seed.

The work of faith is to perform present duty; and then leave the issue with God, who works all things after the counsel of his own will. We have no power over the varied events of life. Circumstances arise which cannot be foreseen, nor prevented if foreseen. Prudence may lay her plans, but he who rules on high can thwart them all. "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." It is, then, the part of Christian wisdom to obey the beautiful precept of Solomon: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding.

In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths." In such a world as this, which is made up of vicissitude and agitations, how highly privileged is the man who can say with David, "The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the strength of my salvation, and my stronghold." Psalm 18:2. How calm is that soul whose cares are laid upon God! This is the Christian's privilege: "Casting all your care upon him, for he cares for you."

"Cast your burden upon the Lord, and he will sustain you." Oh my soul, remember who it is that invites you to this rest. It is Jesus--the friend of sinners. How affectionate is his invitation: "Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Cares are vexatious to a worldly mind. Afflictions are viewed as so many suspensions of worldly happiness. Poverty is dreaded as the greatest worldly evil; and even religion itself is treated as an enemy, because it demands the separation of the heart from worldly lusts and pleasures.

And yet, it is owing to the absence of true religion, that the varied dispensations of Providence become crosses. We meet them in an unsubdued frame of spirit. We murmur and rebel against the correcting hand of our heavenly Father, and thus render that burden heavy, and that yoke grievous, which would otherwise be easy and light. While in this unhappy state of mind, we hear the Gospel with perpetual distraction. The cares of life, like prickling thorns, cover the ground of our heart, and prevent the good seed from springing up and bearing fruit to the glory of God.

"Oh blessed Spirit! awaken my soul to a due solicitude about my everlasting state. Let me not be sowing tares, while your ministers are sowing wheat. Let not my foolish heart by worldly cares choke the precious seed of holy truth. Make me watchful and vigilant. Break up the fallow ground of my heart by deep and abiding convictions, that I may no longer sow among thorns, but yield abundant fruit to the praise of the glory of your grace." RICHES are thorns. What can riches, so coveted after by the world, do for wretched man, simply considered in themselves?

They cannot produce happiness. How many families, overladen with wealth, are made unhappy by the very wealth which they possess! They cannot insure usefulness. How many people do we continually see, who, with the most extensive means of usefulness, are little better than cumberers of the ground! They cannot promote health. How many are rendered the victims of disease, by the facility which wealth affords for gratifying their carnal appetites and luxurious inclinations! They cannot prolong life.

How many are cut off in the midst of their splendor, when they were fondly promising to themselves a long succession of joyous years! If riches cannot procure temporal blessings; if they cannot, by their mere possession, even to their greatest extent, make us happy in ourselves, or useful to others; if they cannot promote health, or prolong life; how much less can they procure spiritual or eternal blessings: the pardon of sin; peace with God; purity of heart; and perpetuity of bliss in heaven!

And yet, wealth is the grand desire of the world. To obtain riches, men are willing to risk the loss of soul and all the glories of heaven. The nominally Christian world is bowing down to the golden image which Satan has set up, while all kinds of music are employed to celebrate its praise. Even real professors of godliness have need to watch continually against the seductive influence of the god of this world. He can paint upon the imagination the shadowy glories of the world, and then whisper to the soul, "all these will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

But Truth lifts up her warning voice to guard her children against the snares of this father of lies: "Those who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men

in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Our blessed Lord, whose love is infinite, has given us a double caution: "take heed--and beware--of covetousness; for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses."

And Paul, writing under the influence of the Spirit of Christ, exhorts us to "let our conversation be without covetousness, and to be content with such things as we have, since God has said: I will never leave you nor forsake you." Riches, when loved and coveted after, become our idols. And even when they do not captivate the affections, they will soon choke the precious seed of divine truth, if not carefully guarded against. Hence our Lord calls it "the deceitfulness of riches."

They draw away the heart insensibly from God, and then they become a curse, and not a blessing. Many who, while in the valley of humiliation, adorned the Gospel and labored with unwearied diligence to promote its extension, have become lukewarm when wealth has filled their coffers. These characters present an awful instance of the danger of worldly prosperity, and should make every professor of the Gospel tremble, lest, when riches increase, his heart should be lifted up, and he forget the Lord his God.

Worldly prosperity is almost always followed by declension. How many Christian families, once the ornaments of the church, have, in their posterity, lost all semblance of piety through the growing prosperity which attended their secular concerns. Oh blessed Lord, give me grace to covet earnestly the best gifts, even the unsearchable riches of Christ; to labor after the attainment of those riches whose value can never be fully known in this lower world; but after which, all, without exception, are graciously invited to seek, that they may obtain everlasting life.

Blessed Jesus! pearl of great price, may you be my treasure. "Give what you will; without you, I am poor; And with you, rich; take what you will away." WORLDLY PLEASURES are thorns. Man has a natural thirst after happiness; but, being blinded through the fall, and having all his appetites vitiated, he is continually seeking that from the world which can only be found in God. Fallen man, like Cain of old, is a fugitive. He is ever flying from the presence of his Creator, who is the source and center of true felicity.

He is daily committing two evils: "forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to himself broken cisterns which can hold no water." Hence he is miserable while in quest of happiness. He drinks of the intoxicating wine of carnal gratification; revels for a time in sensual pleasure; and if he awakens to sober recollection, feels a thousand stings, which too often drive him to despair and death. Consistent professors of godliness readily allow the sinfulness of gross sensual indulgences, and of such worldly amusements as lead directly to the violation of chaste feeling, or into the vortex of fashionable dissipation.

There are, however, pleasures of a sober and innocent kind, which, from their friendly aspect, are unsuspectingly admitted into the heart, and, like the "little foxes, spoil the vines." Few seem to consider that even lawful pleasures, when too eagerly pursued, become sources of pain, by secretly alienating the heart from God. Hence serious Christians have need to guard against giving too much of their mind and time to those pursuits which may insensibly draw them off from private devotion and the daily duties of social life.

The acquirements of music and drawing, as well as the prosecution of literary and philosophical studies, are lawful and agreeable when pursued in subservience to that great end of life so plainly enforced by the apostle: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Religion does not forbid the improvement of our intellectual faculties; it only guards against their abuse. Lawful things are not

always beneficial; and, if abused or used to excess, they become injurious.

Society is pleasant; yet it becomes a snare, if it lead us from our secret chamber by its incessant attractions, and thus make us strangers to God and our own hearts. We are everywhere surrounded with danger. Each pleasure has its poison, and each sweet its snare. And yet, how fleeting! Worldly delights resemble the rose, which droops almost as soon as gathered. Our blessed Lord warns us against those pleasures which too frequently choke the word, as thorns do the growing plant.

The enemy knows this well; and, therefore, when young people, especially, begin to feel their consciences awakened under the faithful preaching of the Gospel, he stirs up their carnal friends to carry them into the various gayeties of life, that the incipient workings of divine grace may be destroyed in the very germ. Oh! then, let us be upon our guard, not only against distracting cares and deceitful riches, but also against delusive pleasures, which, by their smiling face and winning form, would steal away our hearts, and rob us of eternal glory.

Worldly pleasures, like Solomon's many wives, entice the soul to idolatrous attachments and departure from God. There are, however, pleasures pure and peaceful, holy and heavenly, which never cloy or injure the believer. Communion with God in Christ--the enjoyment of the divine favor, through faith in the blood of Jesus--the varied exercises in reading, meditation, and prayer--the society of experienced Christians--visiting the sick--instructing the young--relieving the poor and needy--pouring the balm of consolation into the troubled breast--directing the wanderer to Jesus--restoring the backslider--reproving the profane--promoting peace--and supporting by active and financial exertions those noble institutions which bless our happy land--form so many streams of pleasure, which at once refresh and fructify the soul.

If to these are added the duties of our secular calling, the endearments of domestic life, the well-timed relaxations of music, painting, and gardening, with the higher gratifications of mental study. Where, we may ask, is the lack of enjoyment to the real Christian? He needs not the vanity of the ball-room; the irritations of the card table; the pollutions of the theater; the snares of the race-track; the frivolity of the circus; nor the debaucheries of the club. If poor, he seeks not for the noisy mirth of the ale-house, which ends in rags and misery; he is happy in the bosom of his family, with his Bible and his God.

Oh that my, thirst may daily increase for the holy enjoyment of pure and undefiled religion! How insipid are the boasted pleasures of the world, when compared with these soul-reviving delights, which a God of mercy has provided for the enjoyment of Christian pilgrims! Blessed Jesus! fill my soul with your presence, and then I shall never lack a stream of pure delight, while journeying through this barren wilderness to the heavenly Canaan. Let no cares disturb my peace, no riches deaden my affections, no pleasures enchain my heart.

Like the wise husbandman, in mercy eradicate every noxious thorn, and prepare me by your Spirit to receive and cherish the good word of your grace, that I may bring forth fruit a hundred-fold, to the glory of your holy name. Touched by a sense of love divine, Your goodness, Lord, I feel; What joy to call the Savior mine! Of endless joys the seal! Though round my path a thousand snares Are laid by Satan's art; Though often assailed by earth-born cares, Those traitors of the heart.

Yet still, dear Lord, beneath your smiles, A heaven of joy appears; While faith the weary way beguiles, And hope the prospect cheers. If, through affliction's darksome vale, I downward bend my way, Oh! may your comforts never fail To shed their cheering ray. Or, should I mount the dangerous steep, Where

earthly honors shine, Upheld by you, nor height nor deep, Shall part my love from thine. Whatever I be, or rich or poor, I'll trust your saving name; To all the seed your word is sure, To all who love the Lamb.

Oh! let me taste your goodness more, Each moment as it flies; Until, landed safe on Canaan's shore, Where glory never dies, I see my Savior face to face, Without a veil between; And sing loud praises to his grace, Who saved my soul from sin!

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