

The Unsatisfying Nature of Earthly Things

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the unsatisfying nature of earthly things and the benefits of sanctified affliction, encouraging listeners to choose God and seek their all in Him.

Scripture: Psalm 63:1, Ecclesiastes 2:11, Jeremiah 9:23, Matthew 6:24, 1 Corinthians 1:27, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Philippians 4:11, Hebrews 12:6, Hebrews 12:11, James 2:5

Topics: "Worldly Pursuits", "Sanctification"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches about the unsatisfying nature of earthly things, emphasizing the emptiness and fleetingness of worldly pursuits, contrasting it with the benefit of sanctified affliction that leads to a harvest of right living. He highlights the importance of choosing to serve God over the world, as earthly greatness and pleasures ultimately leave a void that only God can fill, offering true happiness and satisfaction through Jesus Christ. Reade encourages believers to find rest and peace in Christ, who offers everlasting righteousness and grace, transforming hearts and bringing peace with God. He reminds listeners that afflictions, though challenging, are used by God to humble, purify, and strengthen faith, ultimately yielding the fruit of righteousness.

Transcript

50. THE UNSATISFYING NATURE OF EARTHLY THINGS, AND THE BENEFIT OF SANCTIFIED AFFLICTION

"But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless. It was like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere."

Eccles. 2:11

"No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening--it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way." Hebrews 12:11

Paul was in a happy frame when he could say "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." Wealth breeds cares. One staff is a help to the weary traveler; a hundred would press him down. There is much wisdom as well as mercy in the precept; "Let your moderation be known unto all men. Don't worry about anything." Excess often creates engorgement. The man who lives continually in the midst of splendor, views with indifference those costly objects which attract the admiration of strangers. Solomon

withheld his heart from no joy, but the fruit of all his toil was, "vanity and vexation of spirit."

The blessings of Providence are more evenly dealt out than is supposed. There are temptations and trials peculiar to every condition of life. James calls our attention to his important question "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Has not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him? And Paul, in like manner, addresses the Corinthians; "Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes, or powerful, or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important, so that no one can ever boast in the presence of God. " For, this is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise man gloat in his wisdom, or the mighty man in his might, or the rich man in his riches. Let them boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the Lord who is just and righteous, whose love is unfailing, and that I delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

O! my soul, earth and heaven are spread before you. Each are inviting you to closer union. God and Mammon are demanding your service; but both you can not serve. Choose this day whom you will serve, God or the world. You have seen that, when the world has poured its envied greatness upon any individual, he is still every moment liable to the sorrows of the heart, to the diseases of the body, to the stroke of death; and, if unregenerate, to the worm that does not die, and to the fire that never shall be quenched. Your powers are vast, though weakened and corrupted through the Fall. Allied to angels by your spiritual nature, you are ever soaring beyond the boundaries of time, and longing for a something yet unpossessed, a happiness which earth can never give. This restless search for happiness shows you, O my soul, that He who formed you, made you for a holier, happier state than this. When the world has lavished on you all its bliss, the aching void still remains. God alone can satisfy those enlarged desires which stretch themselves into immortality.

Be wise, then, O my soul, look unto that glorious Being who inhabits eternity, who is the fountain of all blessedness, the only source of true, unmixed felicity. Behold him in the person of Jesus Christ; behold, believe, and love! This gracious Emmanuel left the mansions of glory to save you from the abodes of misery. He became poor, that you, through his poverty, might be rich. Oh! tear your affections from these transient scenes, and fix them upon Him who loved you even unto death. Make him your choice; your portion; your everlasting all. He can make poverty, abundance; and abundance, satisfying; for with him you shall have all things and abound. With him is treasured up all bliss and glory; all happiness and felicity; all joy and peace; every delight, and every precious thing.

Come, blessed Redeemer, Savior of sinners, Friend of the lost and wretched, be my present and eternal portion. Oh! make me willing to choose you, and to love you, and to serve you with all my powers. Take full possession of my heart. Enter, heavenly guest, and take up your abode within me. Wash me from all my sins in your cleansing blood. Clothe me with the spotless garment of your Righteousness. Fill me with the grace of your Spirit; and enable me to live to you alone; to seek my all in you; to devote my every power to you; to commit myself, body, soul, and spirit, into your hands, to be sanctified, governed, and preserved through your grace, to the glory of your holy name.

Nothing is more common than to approve of what is good, and yet to follow that which is evil. Few, comparatively, are faithful to their convictions. None can deny the uncertainty of life, and yet all live as if

life were at their command. Schemes of future bliss are devised with as much security, as if the fond projectors were building their fabric on a rock. But soon the illusion vanishes like the mirage of the desert, which leaves the disappointed traveler, when advancing as he hoped towards some refreshing waters, with nothing but the burning sand.

Everything here below is fleeting and transitory. While journeying through this wilderness of troubles, few verdant spots are to be found, on which the weary traveler can repose. The earth lies under the curse. Thorns and thistles cover the ground. Storms and tempests agitate the air. Disease and death dissolve the dearest ties. Yet, in the midst of all this fluctuation, the heart of fallen man would never seek its rest in an Unchangeable Savior, did not the sovereignty of grace reveal the blessing, and make the sinner willing to repose under the shadow of his wing.

Everything around me bespeaks the Fall, and testifies that this is not my rest. Why, then, should my foolish heart repose itself on any creature comfort? Have I still to learn that all of this world, is less than nothing, and vanity? How greatly should I prize the blessed Bible, which reveals the way of reconciliation, and points to the Lamb of God, who alone can take away the sin of the world. Here is rest and peace for the troubled soul. Jesus has brought in an everlasting Righteousness, which is freely imputed to every humble believer. It is gratuitously offered in the Gospel "unto all," and is then placed "upon all those who believe;" so that the vilest sinner, thus receiving Christ by faith, is "accepted in the Beloved," and through the Almighty power of the Holy Spirit, is made a new creature in Christ Jesus.

This is the Gospel. It brings "Glory to God in the highest." All the divine perfections harmonize and shed their united splendor around the Cross! It proclaims "Good-will toward men." Through the preaching of the gospel, through the holding up of Christ crucified, sinners are entreated to come; yes, are powerfully drawn to God, being assured, from this manifestation of his grace, that he wills not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. It diffuses "Peace on earth." The contending sinner lays down his hostile weapons, and through faith in the blood of Christ, obtains peace with God. The stormy conscience is hushed; the rough disposition is softened; and these blessed effects of the peaceful reign of Jesus will never cease to operate, until nations shall war no more.

Oh! that this happy period, this antepast of heaven, may be hastened on the earth. Lord grant that this millennial blessedness may now be felt and enjoyed in my own soul. Oh! blessed Jesus, Prince of Peace, reveal yourself to my heart; soften, melt, and renew it. Consume all the dross which it contains, and transform it, wholly, after your image; that, while surrounded by evils of every name, and sorrows of every kind, which abound in this rebellious, dying world, I may enjoy the light of your countenance, and the purifying influence of your love.

These, O divine Redeemer, are indeed great blessings which I am now asking for; but am I not encouraged to enlarge my desires, to expand my heart, to stretch forth the hand of faith, that I may receive out of your fullness, and grace for grace?

You, who are the fountain of living waters, have said; "Whoever will, let him take the water of life freely." "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." Fill me with your love; satiate my soul with your goodness; and make me an everlasting trophy of your grace.

Blessed Savior! I am quite unable to love and serve you, by any natural will or power of my own. At your command, I would work out my own salvation, by the diligent use of appointed means; and yet, with fear and trembling, from a consciousness of my own depravity, and the deceits of Satan. But you must work in

me to will and to do of your good pleasure, for without You I can do nothing. As you condescended to visit the humble dwelling of Lazarus, be pleased to look down upon a family of sinful worms, who now entreat the favor that you bear unto your people. Oh! visit us with your salvation, that we may daily rejoice in you.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous; afflictions peculiar to themselves. They partake, indeed, of bodily and temporal trials, in common with their brethren of mankind; but they are often called to endure tribulations from which the worldly are exempt. They suffer for righteousness' sake. They take up the cross and follow Christ, through evil report and good report. They submit to have their name cast out as evil; to be accounted as the off-scouring of all things. Their inward trials are known only to themselves, and to Him who searches the heart. They have to struggle against indwelling sin; against the law in the members, which wars against the law of the mind. They have to contend against the suggestions of unbelief, the workings of pride, the lustings of the flesh, and the love of the world. There are seasons when darkness seems to overspread their souls, and hope to suffer an eclipse.

At such a period, Satan casts into the citadel of the heart, his fiery darts, and opens all his dread artillery to dismay and overcome the afflicted believers in Jesus. But all-prayer in the name of Christ prevails; for "when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." The foe is foiled- the darkness is dissipated; and light and joy once more fill the souls of the conquering saints.

If it be asked, Why is this? It is because the Lord, whose wisdom and love are infinite, is pleased to overrule these trials to humble and purify his people. By these afflictions, their faith is strengthened; the spirit of prayer is quickened; their humility is increased; their love inflamed; and their dependence rendered more simple and entire.

The dearest children of God have been deeply afflicted by family trials, as well as by inward conflicts. Adam, had his Cain. Noah, his Ham. Abraham, his Ishmael. Jacob, his ten unnatural sons and erring daughter. Aaron, his Nadab and Abihu. Eli, his Hophni and Phineas. Samuel, his Joel and Abijah. David, his Amnon and Absalom. Jehoshaphat, his Jehoram. Jotham, his Ahaz. Hezekiah, his Manasseh. Josiah, his Jehoiakim.

A pious parent cannot produce a pious offspring. The taint of original sin pollutes the streams which flow downwards from fallen Adam. Grace alone can effect the change. These fatherly chastenings are all sanctified to the people of God. For the present, they are not joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward they yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby. God does not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men. He corrects us like a wise and loving parent, for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.

Blessed Lord! enable me to be calm and passive under your chastening hand. I know that you do all things well; and that it shall be well with those who love and fear you. Keep me as the apple of your eye. Hide me under the shadow of your wing. Wean my heart from all earthly vanities, and cause me to wing my way towards You. You can embitter every comfort; and sweeten every cross. Preserve me from all idolatrous attachments to the things of this world. Reveal Yourself to me in the fullness of your love, through a believing view of the truth as it is in Jesus. I know, O Lord, that in very faithfulness, you cause me to be afflicted. But oh! how gentle is the stroke of your rod; how loving are your corrections. I might justly experience the weight of your wrath; instead of this, I am only called to bear the easy yoke of parental discipline. And shall I murmur or complain? O that songs of praise, and feelings of joy, and expressions of gratitude, may ever manifest the state of my heart. You, O Lord, are worthy to be praised.

Your loving-kindness is great. Your mercy is infinite. Your grace is unbounded. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name; for his name only is excellent, and his praise above heaven and earth.

How great, O worldling, is your dread mistake,

How fatal sin's inebriating power;

Are you content, for wealth, for honor's sake,

To bear the anguish of a dying hour?

Its pain, your treacherous heart will quickly feel;

Soon must you leave the fairest scene below;

Your peace will bleed, as on the pointed steel,

When death shall hurl you to the world of woe.

In flaming fire, with majesty arrayed,

The Lord will call you to his awful throne;

Then earth, with all its dazzling joys, will fade

Beneath the terrors of Jehovah's frown.

Worldling! be wise; awake, awake from sin!

Ah! think how vain the pleasures of an hour;

The voice of mercy calls- it speaks within,

And bids you trust in Jesus' Grace and Power.

Fly to the Cross- the Savior you invites;

A gracious Father calls you to his Son;

Believe the Message, which his love indites,

Reject the Mercy-and you are undone.

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