

Care For The Morrow

A Sermon by Rev. Kurt H. Asplundh

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own evil" (Matt. 6:34).

The Israelites in the wilderness had a real concern about the morrow, yet they were absolutely unable to store up extra food. They were commanded to gather enough manna for their households for a day and were not to save any for the next day. When some refused to obey this law and tried to keep extra manna for another day, it turned bad and became wormy. Only on the sixth day could they gather an extra ration for use on the Sabbath day. Otherwise, they were completely dependent upon the daily appearance of this miraculous food from the Lord. They had to trust the Lord. They had no other choice.

This forced way of life with the Jews prefigured the ideal way of life for Christians. They too were to learn trust in the Lord. Note that what the Jews observed from external compulsion sometimes became a matter of conscience for Christians. And so, echoing the necessity of the ancient past, the Lord taught His disciples not to worry about tomorrow. "Do not worry about your life," He said, "what you will eat or what you will drink ... Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? Therefore do not worry.." (Matt. 6:25, 27., 31). This was a new way of teaching that we should trust in the Lord's providential care.

What of us today? Now, in the Heavenly Doctrine the Lord has repeated, in yet another way, the same eternal truth for the New Church. It is still true that we should not worry, that is, have an anxious concern about our life. What the Lord has added for the New Church is a rational expression of the truth and a deeper understanding of what is meant by trust in the Lord.

The Israelite in the wilderness was forced to trust that the Lord would care for him. The Lord's disciple felt a personal obligation to trust his Lord and seek the kingdom of God. The New Churchman, in addition, is taught how the Lord's Providence operates for his salvation, and how he may cooperate with the Lord's leading. He is shown the nature of Divine order. He can have a rational trust.

Not worrying about tomorrow means accepting Divine order. It means being content with our lot in life, and not only that but being content with the mercy of the Lord.

There is a clear and beautiful teaching of the Writings about this matter of worry or care for tomorrow's needs. It seems almost to contradict the teaching of our text, but actually gives it a new depth and dimension. So we read: "He who looks at the subject no more deeply than from the sense of the letter may believe that all care for the morrow is to be cast aside, and thus that the necessities of life are to be awaited daily from heaven; but he who looks at the subject more deeply...from the internal sense, is able to know what is meant by 'care for the morrow.' It does not mean the care of procuring for one's self food and clothing, and even resources for the time to come; for it is not contrary to order for anyone to be provident for himself and his own. But those have care for the morrow who are not content with their lot; who do not trust in the Divine, but in themselves; and who have regard for only worldly and earthly things, and not for heavenly things" (AC 8478,.2).

Note here that the teaching applies to what is truly important in human life: our spiritual welfare. Often we are so bound up with anxiety about natural and material things that we fail to see that the Lord's greatest concern is for our eternal welfare. Our Heavenly Father knows that we need the things of this world in order to live. He provides these for us just as surely as He put manna on the ground for Moses, but in such a way that we have a part in obtaining them. Our natural concern for providing for daily needs for ourselves and family is not what the Lord was talking about. We must work and plan for the future. What we should not have is an anxiety or worry that comes from failing to trust that the Lord has the ability and the desire to lead us to heavenly happiness.

"Very different is the case with those who trust in the Divine," we are told. "These, notwithstanding they have care for the morrow, still have it not, because they do not think of the morrow with solicitude, still less with anxiety. Unruffled is their spirit whether they obtain the objects of their desire or not; and they do not grieve over the loss of them, being content with their lot ... They know that for those who trust in the Divine all things advance toward a happy state to eternity, and that whatever befalls them in time is still conducive thereto" (AC 8478:3).

Yet, this being said, it is well to note in addition that the Lord's teaching also applies directly. While it is certain that we ought not to await a miraculous provision from heaven of all that we need for earthly life, it is also true that our concern for tomorrow should be free from anxiety. The Lord does not forbid thought about our material necessities. What the Lord literally forbids in this text is "anxious thought." Anxiety and worry are outward signs of an inner lack of faith.

We should not expend our energies in anxious thought about what we may face tomorrow. Our energies should be directed rather to the faithful and sincere performance of our duties and responsibilities as they occur day by day. What we do today is providentially in preparation for tomorrow, and if we have prepared for tomorrow in this way, with a sincere and industrious effort to do what lies before us each day, there is no reason to harbor anxious fears about tomorrow. It is irrational to be anxious about what is beyond our power or control. Here, however, we are consoled by the Writings. We are told that while we live on earth we cannot entirely free ourselves from these worldly concerns (see AC 3938:7). Only the angels have "no solicitude about future things" (AC 1382). This is mentioned not to excuse our solicitude or anxiety of life, but to let us know our limitations as earthlings and so that we are not discouraged when such states recur.

But whenever possible we ought to try to reduce our degree of anxiety about the future. This is defined by the angels as "grief on account of losing or not receiving things that are not necessary for the uses of life" (HE 278:2). Certainly, when a matter of concern involves something unnecessary, we should not allow it to become so important to us that we grieve over its loss. Why spend emotional energy worrying about things that do not really matter?

The text appears to deal with a matter of time: tomorrow. The truth is that there is no time in matters relating to the Lord and spiritual life. There is a succession of states of life. These are all immediately present to the Lord. This is well known to angels of heaven. "The more interior and perfect the angels are," we are told, "the less do they care for past things, and the less do they think of things to come; and also that from this comes their happiness. They say that the Lord gives them every moment what to think, and this with blessedness and happiness; and that they are thus free from cares and anxieties" (AC 2493).

The angels live in the present. We too must learn to live in the present to the best of our ability, knowing that the Lord will prepare us by this for what is to come.

"Sufficient for the day is its own evil," we are told. This is what our concern should be about, the particular states we see in ourselves at any given time. We must face these and put them behind us before we go on to a new day. Our strength to do this is from the Lord. To worry about tomorrow means to lack the trust that the Lord has power to lead us from state to state toward heaven. It means that we are unwilling to walk the narrow path of spiritual progress, enduring states of grief or sadness which may come, or apparent failure in temptation, thinking instead that we can lead ourselves better than the Lord can.

The conceit that we can lead ourselves to heaven better than the Lord results in a spiritual condition pictured by the condition of the overripe manna. It bred worms and stank. So trust in ourselves breeds both falsity and evil of life.

The Lord's words in the text are a command to shun an evil. Again, the Lord said: "Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with ... cares of this life" (Luke 21:34). Why should we be careful to avoid anxious thoughts and worry? Because there is harm in it. "This care is not only forbidden," the Writings teach, "but is also condemned" (AC 8478:2).

Reflect upon the harm done by anxious thought. Not only does it destroy our peace of mind and reduce our usefulness, it does something more harmful. "The cares of this world ... entering in choke the Word" (Mark 4:19). It draws our mind away from spiritual things. Excessive concern for ourselves and our earthly welfare attacks our faith just as hatred attacks love. The effect of anxious thoughts was demonstrated to Swedenborg in the spiritual world. "It has sometimes happened," Swedenborg wrote, "that I was earnestly thinking about worldly things, and about such things as give great concern to most persons ... At these times I noticed that I was sinking down into what is sensuous; and that in proportion as my thought was immersed in such things, I was removed from the company of the angels ... For when such thoughts possess the whole of the mind, they carry the lower mind downward, and are like weights which drag it down; and when they are regarded as the end, they remove the man from heaven.." (AC 6210).

We are all obliged by the Lord to shun the evil of excessive concern. We read: "Solicitude about the future, when confirmed by act, greatly dulls and retards the influx of spiritual life.." (AC 5177).

What holds true for anxiety about our natural welfare holds true equally for anxiety about our spiritual state. We should not concern ourselves with imagined evils, or evils we fear may be hidden within the depths of our mind. It is sufficient for us to face the active evils of our present state and work to overcome them. Meeting and shunning them one by one with humility of spirit, with a prayer for the Lord's help and a confidence in His Divine power, is all the Lord requires of us.

We make but little progress against the entire hereditary nature. It is as though we are chipping at cracks in a seemingly impassable mountain of self-love. Yet, if we do each day the little that is required in that day, the Lord will care for the rest. "Have faith in God," the Lord said. "For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be thou removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that those things he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says" (Mark 11:22| 23).

This is the way we are to seek for the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Then all things we need, both those things of the spirit and those of the body, will be added by the Lord. "Therefore I say to you, do not worry 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? But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own evil. (Matt. 6:25, 33, 34). Amen.

Lessons: Exodus 16:11-26; Matt. 6:19-34; AC 2493; SD 2190