

## "HOW TO FACE THE FUTURE"

### INTRODUCTION

For me to stand up here and take it upon myself to tell you how to face the future may seem the height of presumption. It would be if I were in the pulpit to air my own views on the subject. Instead I would invite your attention to something that was said about it by Christ in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew.

"Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day".

### DEVELOPMENT

Like the Sermon on the Mount as a whole, this may impress us as a counsel of perfection - admirable as an ideal, but unattainable as a reality, beyond us now that the holidays are over and that we're back to work.

Ours is the age of anxiety. More and more the minds of people are full of foreboding. Thoughtful, perceptive people, appraising the state of the nation and the world, are apprehensive and troubled. As Dr. Metzner suggested to us last week in his sermon, we face an uneasy New Year. The nation is divided on some great issues. The words of Christ look like the counsel of perfection. Whom among us lived up to them last year? Why should we suppose we can live up to them in 1968?

However, before we rule his advice out as impractical, too idealistic, out of our reach, let us be sure we understand what He is saying to us. He is not vetoing foresight or suggesting that we make no plans for the future, to allow it to shape itself. I think we are short-sighted and foolish if we do not plan ahead, provide for our emergencies, take out insurance as a coverage against illness and accident and the day of our death.

Our Lord himself habitually looked into the future and pondered the character and culmination of His mission. There were those persons, He said, who looked forward too little, who bungled the business of living because they didn't make long-range plans or take adequate precautions. And to illustrate his point He drew vivid word pictures of an unfinished tower, a plough abandoned in mid-field, a frightened king caught ill-prepared for battle and patching up in his panic a hasty truce.

What is vetoed is not foresight, but worry - and with the veto goes a cure for worry: to live one day at a time. Worry is the most futile of activities. It saps our vitality, ruins our happiness, draws heavily on our energies, put dark lines on our faces, and makes us old before our time. Generally speaking, when we worry it is because we attempt to deal today with our fears about tomorrow. We look for trouble before it looks for us; we go out to meet it halfway. We make things harder than they need be. We go over the rough places on the road of life twice - first in anticipation and then in actuality. Somebody has said that worry is the interest paid on trouble before it becomes due. I wonder then, is it a counsel of perfection to say:

"Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself."

This is good sense - good psychology and good Christianity.

### APPLYING THE RULE TO OTHER AREAS

I think we have a rule here that can be applied to the problems of character and conduct. Alcoholics Anonymous makes of it a fixed rule. The movement does not

advise the alcoholic to take a pledge of abstinence for life. This would indeed be a counsel of perfection and would probably have them beaten from the start. The chances are that they would be skeptical of their ability to deprive themselves for a year, a month, even a week of the thing for which they have a terrifying and compulsive craving. The movement urges them, relying on the grace of God, simply to resolve: "For this one day, I will not touch liquor". Conquering the habit by dealing with it a day at a time is one of the fundamental rules of AA.

Alcohol may not be our problem, but there is not one of us in the matter of character and personal conduct who does not have a fight on his hands. If it is not something like alcohol, it may be lust or laziness. If it is not a sin of the body, it may be a sin of the disposition: pride, envy, temper, self-pity, prejudice. I may not have named it, but if you know yourself and are not living an unexamined life - you can. Whatever it is, if you really want to get the better of it, the thing to do (and this is something everybody can do) is to rely on the grace of God and resolve inwardly: "For this one day I will not yield to it". Made as we are and vulnerable to the temptations of the flesh and the spirit, none of us no matter how sincere and earnest the resolutions we make for the New Year and the years that remain to us, can be what we should be and want to be for a lifetime, but each of us can pledge and brace himself at least to one day's high endeavor. If we do that today, the prospect is bright for tomorrow, and the strength gained today will stand us in good stead tomorrow. As it has been said, "Each victory will help you some other to win".

A GUIDING PRINCIPLE FOR LIFE

There is more here than a rule for tackling problems of character and conduct. We have here a guiding principle for the whole of life and in particular for the attitude and spirit in which we face the future. Living a day at a time is good sense, it is good psychology and good Christianity.

Over the years I have gathered a number of personal testimonies in my sermon notebook which bear this out. This one is from a medical man, Sir William Osler:

"I was attending the Montreal General Hospital, much worried as to the future, partly about the final examination, partly as to what I should do afterwards. I picked up a volume of Carlyle, and on the page I opened there was this familiar sentence - 'OUR MAIN BUSINESS IS NOT TO SEE WHAT LIES DIMLY AT A DISTANCE, BUT TO DO WHAT LIES CLEARLY AT HAND'. A common place sentiment, but it hit and stuck and helped, and was the startingpoint of a habit that has enabled me to utilize to the full the single talent entrusted to me. Now the way of life that I preach is the practice of living for the day only, and for the day's work - life in daylight compartments".

This from a historian, G. M. Trevelyan,

"Looking forward to the months and the years to come is very dreary and depressing, but we do not live life in the lump, but day by day, and each day brings its own work, and some expedient to help us".

This from a novelist, Mark Rutherford:

"I learned, alas! when it was almost too late to live in each moment as it passed over my head, believing that the sun as it is now rising, is as good as it ever will be"

And this one from a scientist, Marie Curie:

"My dear children, I send you my best wishes for a New Year. That is to say, a year of good health - good humor - and good work. A year in which you will have pleasure living every day, without waiting for the day to be gone before finding charm in it, and without putting all hope of pleasure in the day to come. The older one gets the more one feels that the present must be enjoyed; it is a precious gift comparable to a state of grace"

This one is one that I came across recently and which we put on the bulletin board on the front of the church:

"Life is hard by the yard, but by the inch life's a cinch"

And finally this one, from Robert Louis Stevenson:

"Every man can get through till nightfall"

CHRIST'S WAY; Finally - did I say? No - not finally - for this, my friends, was the way of Christ - the supreme expert in the art of living. This was how he lived. He welcomed and made the most of each day as it came, enjoyed the simple pleasures of life - the beauty of the lilies, the games of little children, the fellowship and the comradeship of friends.

"Give us this day our daily bread" - this is what he asked his followers to pray. For Him the best thing about the future was that it was in the hands of God and under His control and came one day at a time. To Him - faith meant not worrying. He knew his Bible well and must have fortified His inner life on the promise, "As thy days so shall thy strength be" - mind you, not years, not months, not weeks - but days. "As thy days so shall thy strength be".

And then as a parting legacy He made us a promise of His own: "Lo I am with you all the days to the end". Remember it as you greet each new day of 1968!

LET US PRAY O God Eternal, whose love is unfailing, at the beginning of another year we praise Thee that our times are controlled by Thee. We praise Thee for Thy goodness and mercy which has followed us. We thank Thee for failures and sorrows Thou didst weave into a pattern of good. We thank thee for Thy forgiveness of our past wrongs and for the assurance that Christ will go with us to the end and beyond.

Grant that we may show forth our thanks by obedience to Him, in our labors and in our leisure, in our laughter and in our tears, in our worship and in our love of our fellow man.

O God, who art the beginning and the end of all things, grant us so to pass through the coming year with faith in Thee and love toward Christ and one another, that we may think and do always such things as shall please Thee, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

A doctor who was frequently consulted by people whose ills were mainly the results of their anxieties made a catalog of the worries of his patients. He found that forty per cent of them worried over things which never happened. Thirty per cent of the worries were over past matters which were now beyond their control. Twelve per cent were anxious over their health, although their only illness was in their imagination. Ten per cent worried over their families and friends and neighbors, although in most cases these people were endowed with enough common sense to look after themselves. Eight per cent of the worries had real causes which needed attention. If the doctor's analysis was correct, nine tenths of our worries are entirely useless and are unworthy of the concern of intelligent people.