

Sermon: Today's Mercies for Today's Troubles; Tomorrow's Mercies for Tomorrow's Troubles

Matthew 6:34 and Lamentations 3:22-23

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Introduction

Sometimes I have reinforced a sermon by following it up with a STAR article (The STAR is Bethlehem Baptist's weekly newsletter). Today I want to reinforce a STAR article with a following sermon. The STAR article last week was called, "Today's Mercies for Today's Troubles; Tomorrow's Mercies for Tomorrow's Troubles." There were several points. One was this: Every day God appoints a measure of pleasure and pain for that day—like the old Swedish hymn says:

He whose heart is kind beyond all
measure,
Gives unto each day what he
deems best—
Lovingly, its part of pain and
pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.

Kind beyond all measure, the Lord gives pain and pleasure to each day as he deems best. We don't always agree enthusiastically with what God deems best for us. It is hard for us to feel that he is kind beyond all measure when he gives us pain. Causing pain is not generally equated with showing kindness, especially if God's measure for one day is a lot more than another day. But it's true, as we will see more fully in a moment. God gives each day his wise and loving measure of pain and pleasure. That was the first point of the STAR article.

The second was that there is fresh mercy

from God for each day's appointed pain. Today's mercies are not designed to carry tomorrow's burdens. There will be mercies tomorrow for that. Today's mercies are for today's burdens. But tomorrow? What about tomorrow? What will become of our children? Will they believe? Or will they forsake the way of righteousness? What will become of our health? Will we go blind or deaf or lose our memories? Who will take care of us? Will we spend the last 10 years of our lives out-living all our friends and family, abandoned, slumped over in a wheel chair at a rural nursing home? What will become of our marriages? Will we ever trust again? Will we laugh and play and pray and talk in peace? Will we be there for the children? Will we be there for each other? Will it be sad and strained and dissatisfying for 30 or 40 more years? What will it be like tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow? What will become of our church? What will tomorrow bring? Or Wednesday? Or next Sunday? Or a year from now? Or ten years from now? Will we be together? Will we be winning the lost, and standing for righteousness, and delivering the oppressed, and sending more and more missionaries to the unreached peoples, and resting in the care of 17 district elders, and worshipping with white-hot zeal for the glory and grace of our great God? What about tomorrow? Will we have the strength to live tomor-

row when it comes? And to live it well and wisely and even joyfully, no matter what God's measure of pain and pleasure?

The point of the STAR article was that the strength to live tomorrow will be given tomorrow, not today. And it will be given. Our task today is not to have the strength needed for tomorrow's burdens. Our task today is to live by the mercies given for today, and to believe that there will be new mercies for tomorrow. Today's mercies do not include strength for tomorrow; they include faith that tomorrow's unseen mercies will be sufficient for tomorrow.

I can't express how important I believe this is for the living of the Christian life—for children, for teenagers, for college students and young adults in the work world, for middle-aged people facing major life changes, for older people with tremendous uncertainties before them, for single people and married people. It's important because of how natural and strong is the impulse in our hearts to want to feel sufficient today for tomorrow's challenges. We don't like it when the gauge reads "empty" at the end of the day, and we have to go to sleep—if we can—not feeling the power for tomorrow's troubles.

The Christian's Secret of Dealing with Trouble

There is a secret to the Christian life here that I want you to get a handle on. If you don't—if you go on desperately needing to feel today the strength for tomorrow, then it seems to me that either you will cave in under the pressure of excessive anxieties, or you will find a worldly strategy for developing immense ego strength and persuade yourself that you really are sufficient for tomorrow's troubles. Neither of those is God's way. God's way is summed up in two passages of scripture. One is Matthew

6:34, "Do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (The other text is Lamentations 3:22-23. See below.)

Let me tell you what I think that text does not mean. It does not mean: Make no preparations for tomorrow's needs. If you're a farmer, the thought about tomorrow's empty silos should cause you to sow your field with corn months before you need the corn. Almost everything that is worth doing requires some forethought, planning, and preparation. Jesus said, "Which of you desiring to build a tower does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?" (Luke 14:28). The point of Matthew 6:34 is not—don't make wise preparations. The point is—don't bring the troubles and uncertainties of carrying out those preparations tomorrow into today. "Each day has enough trouble of its own."

What does Jesus mean by "enough"? Or as the old Authorized Version says, "Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof." What does he mean by "sufficient"? He means that your sovereign heavenly Father, who is kind and wise beyond all measure, lovingly gives unto each day what he deems best, including both its pain and pleasure. Each day's troubles are "enough"—they are "sufficient"—because God determines their limit. God decides what is enough and what is sufficient (cf. 1 Cor 10:13).

You can know some of the pressures that are coming tomorrow. And part of your job may be to make some preparations for them. Those preparations are part of today's "sufficient" trouble. But how those preparations will turn out tomorrow, and whether you feel strong enough today to do your part tomorrow—that is not something God wants you to carry today. Those are tomorrow's burdens. God does

not give mercies today for bearing tomorrow's burdens.

For example, we on the staff must now plan and design worship services ahead of time. It's like the farmer: we know that if there is going to be a harvest of corporate worship on Sunday, there needs to be some plowing, sowing, and watering earlier in the week. That's OK. Jesus wants us to do that.

But what about the questions that start to arise from the flesh: How will it go on Sunday? Will the people be there? Will God meet us? Will it be real and deep and earnest and life-changing and soul-winning and Christ-exalting? Will the people be disappointed? With these questions we can cross the line from faithful preparation to unfaithful anxiety. We cross over from dealing with today's sufficient burden (preparation) and begin to borrow tomorrow's troubles (how will it be received?). And that is spiritually very dangerous because today's mercies are given by God for today's burdens not tomorrow's.

Or the danger can happen another way. Not only can we start to fret about how our preparations will turn out, but we can start to fret over whether we will have the resources to handle all the preparations after this. What about Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday and Easter and then April and May and June and July and August? Will the spiritual resources be there? That too can be a crossing over the line between faithful planning and unfaithful anxiety. The strength to plan worship for July 10, will be given on July 5th and 6th. And probably not before.

Now where in scripture do I get this confidence that God not only gives the trouble to each day that is sufficient for that day, but also the mercies which are tailor-made to carry that day's trouble? I get it

from (among other places) Lamentations 3:22-23, "The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness."

It's the phrase "they are new every morning" that gives me this great confidence that each day's mercies—each day's kindnesses—are given specifically for that day. Ponder that with me. Let it sink in. "His mercies . . . are new every morning."

Why are they new every morning? Why does God do it that way? It's not because yesterday's mercies were bad or weak. It's because they were yesterday's. Yesterday's mercies were for yesterday's burdens. Today's mercies are for today's burdens. They are new every morning. They are like the manna in the wilderness: you can't keep it overnight. Enough comes for each day. You live on God day by day, or you don't live on God.

The Swedish hymn gets it right again. The second verse says, "Every day the Lord himself is near me, With a special mercy for each hour." A special mercy for each hour. The mercy to carry you through this hour is given in this hour. This truth will save your life again and again, if you grasp it and live it. Because how many times in life do we come to the end of our resources and say, "There isn't anything in here anymore. I am depleted. One more straw and this camel's back will break." And we despair that tomorrow will just be rolled on to today's depleted condition. And at that moment we desperately need this truth: God will not expect you to carry one more straw with these present mercies. When the next straw is added the mercies will be new.

So we must not compound today's load with fretting over tomorrow's. We must not doubt God and say, "I have no more

strength; so tomorrow will be impossible to live.” That’s not true. You will not be asked to live tomorrow on today’s strength. What you need today is not tomorrow’s strength, but today’s faith that tomorrow’s mercies will be new and will be enough.

And there’s something different between the experience of faith for tomorrow’s power, and the actual experience of that power itself. Faith stands on the promise of God and waits and hopes in weakness and peace. And, of course, that waiting and hoping is part of today’s mercy. Part of today’s mercy is the ability to trust that there will be sufficient mercy for tomorrow. And we trust in that because God promises it in Lamentations 3:23 (cf. Phil 4:19; 2 Cor 9:8-11).

But in spite of all the peace that faith can bring about today, it is not yet tomorrow’s mercy or tomorrow’s power. There’s a difference. And that’s why there is such a battle that goes on. We want the feeling of adequacy today for what we will have to go through tomorrow. But God says, “Trust me. I will give it to you when you need it.”

Let me illustrate what I am saying by the following story. In 1931 a missionary named John Vinson was working in North China. An army of bandits swooped down on his village looting, burning, and killing. They took 150 Chinese and Vinson captive. When the government troops pursued, the bandits offered Vinson his freedom if he would write a letter to the commanding officer of the government troops asking him to withdraw.

Vinson said, “Will you let the Chinese prisoners go free?” “Certainly not” was the reply. “Then I refuse to go free,” he said. That night the bandits tried to flee, taking Vinson with them. Many bandits were killed, and many of the captives escaped. Vinson could not run because of a recent

surgery. A little Chinese girl later reported that a bandit pointed a gun at Vinson’s head and said, “I’m going to kill you. Aren’t you afraid?”

Now at this point how do you feel? Are you projecting yourself into Vinson’s place? If so, do you feel rising within you the power to respond with great serenity and to die with peace? The point of what I have been saying is this: you don’t have to feel that right now. What God wants from you now as you sit there is not the strength to die that death. That is not today’s trouble for you. It may be tomorrow’s. What God calls you to now is not to have the power to do what Vinson did, but to have the trust in God that when your time comes he will give what you need.

Vinson looked up and said, “No, I am not afraid. If you kill me, I will go straight to God.” Which he did.¹

Today’s mercies for today’s troubles; tomorrow’s mercies for tomorrow’s troubles. “As your days so shall your strength be” (Deut 33:25). Don’t be anxious about tomorrow. The troubles and the mercies are appointed day by day.

ENDNOTES

¹This story is taken from *The Elizabeth Elliot Newsletter*, March/April 1994.