

CHAPTER XXVII

LIVING DAY BY DAY

“Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day will bring forth.”—[PROV. 27:1](#).

“The grave and destruction are never satisfied; and the eyes of men are never satisfied;” and LXX. adds, “An abomination to the Lord is he who sets his eye, and undisciplined men uncontrolled in tongue.”—[PROV. 27:20](#).

“Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof, so he that waits on his Lord eats of the honour.”—[PROV. 27:18](#).

HERE is a wholesome lesson for us. We are to trust no future, however pleasant; we are to dwell in no past, however honourable. Life consists of a present, given to us day by day; this is our whole wealth; squandered, it cannot be recovered; neglected, it withers as a leaf. Titus, the Roman Emperor, would say in the evening, when he had omitted his duties or failed in his purposes, *Perdidi diem*, “I have lost a day;”—yes, that lost day is lost for ever; other days may come, but not that one; the duties of that day may be performed afterwards or by other hands, but still the day is lost, because it passed away empty. The thief which cheats us of our days, and beggars us of our wealth, is the specious thought that to-morrow belongs to us. The illusion is as old as the world, but is to-day as fresh and powerful as ever. We have to shake ourselves free of a spell, and awake out of a dream, to see that when to-morrow comes it is already to-day.

We only begin to live in any true and satisfactory sense when we have learnt to take each day by itself, and to use it as if it were our last, and indeed as if it were our all; dismissing the thought of to-morrow as a mere phantom which for ever evades our grasp. Life is a mosaic, a large work shaping on the wall or in the dome of some vast cathedral which eye hath not yet seen; and it can only be effectually wrought if, with minute and concentrated care, the little piece of coloured glass which we call To-day is duly fixed into its bedding and fitted exactly to its immediate neighbours. “Why do you work with such intensity?” the great artist was once asked; “Because I work for eternity,” was the answer. And that is why each day is of such importance; that is why each day demands all our thought and care: eternity is made up of days, and the present day is all of eternity that we can ever possess.

It is well for us then each morning to take the day fresh from God’s hands, and at once to throw our whole soul into it, and to live it with a pure intensity, a sense of solemn and joyful responsibility.

“Oh, Day, if I squander a wavelet of thee,

A mite of my twelve-hours’ treasure,

The least of thy gazes or glances

(Be they grants thou art bound to or gifts above measure),

Oscar L. Joseph, *The Expositor’s Bible: Psalms to Isaiah*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, vol. 3, Expositor’s Bible (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton Co., 1903).

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One of thy choices or one of thy chances

(Be they tasks God imposed thee or freaks of thy pleasure),—

My Day, if I squander such labour or leisure,

Then shame fall on Asolo, mischief on me.”*

But it may be said, Is not this the life of a mere butterfly? Is it not the mark of a prudent man to work with his eye on the future,—“Prepare thy work without, and make it ready for thee in the field, and afterwards build thine house”* Is it not just what we have to complain of in the foolish man that he ignores to-morrow,—“A prudent man seeth the evil and hideth himself, but the simple pass on and suffer for it”?†

Here is an apparent contradiction which requires reflection. And the difficulty increases when we remember that most worthy works are the labour of years: an architect lays his plans for a great building which he can hardly hope to see finished in his own lifetime; an author spends days and months and years in the preparation of materials, and must depend on the uncertain future for a time to shape them into a book; a statesman, in proportion as he is wise, avoids what is called a hand-to-mouth policy, and lays his plans with his eye on distant possibilities, well knowing that his immediate actions are liable to misunderstanding, and may prove to be a complete failure unless the opportunity is accorded him of realising his far-reaching schemes. And, in the same way, youth is spent in education which derives all its value from the expected years of manhood, and all the days of a good life are necessarily a preparation for that which is to come after: we must study in order that we may teach; we must train ourselves for duties which will come upon us, as we may reasonably suppose, in some distant future. Yet our to-morrow is unknown; we are not to boast ourselves of it; we cannot tell what a day may bring forth, and must therefore live only in to-bring forth, and must therefore live only in to-day.

Now the solution of this difficulty leads us to one of the profoundest of all spiritual truths. It is this: No life can be worth anything at all apart from the Eternal God, and faith in Him. Life cannot be really lived if it is merely “a measure of sliding sand” taken “from under the feet of the years.” Our swift days cannot be effectually and wisely used unless we are linked with Him who embraces in Himself the past, the present, and the future. Our work, whatever it may be, cannot be rightly done unless we are, and know ourselves to be, in the great Task-master’s sight. The proper use of each day can only be made if we are confident that our times are in His hands; only in this quiet assurance can we have composure and detachment of spirit enough to give our whole strength to the duty in hand. We must be sure that the Master-Artist knows the whole mosaic, and is ordering all the parts, before we can surrender ourselves to the task of putting to-day’s piece into its place; we must have complete faith in the Architect who is designing the whole structure, before we can have our mind at leisure from itself to chip our block of stone or to carve our tiny gargoyle. We can only live in the present, making the most of that which is really ours, on condition that we have God as our Future, relieving us of all anxious care, and assuring to us just strength for to-day.

Thus our text has an implied contrast, which we may draw out in this way: “Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth;” but boast thyself in God all the day long,‡ for thou knowest that He will bring forth righteousness, wisdom, and love continually.

Oscar L. Joseph, *The Expositor’s Bible: Psalms to Isaiah*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, vol. 3, Expositor’s Bible (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton Co., 1903).

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Now let us follow out some of the consequences of this spiritual attitude. Examine the condition of these restless human hearts all around us without God. They are all toiling for to-morrow. Here is one making money, as it is called; he is looking forward to laying aside so many thousands this year; in a few more years he hopes to realise a round sum which will relieve him from the necessity of toil and of further money-making. His eye is set upon that goal. At last he reaches it. Now his desire should be satisfied, but no, "Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and the eyes of man are never satisfied."* He does not stay a night at the desired goal; he is off before sunset; all the strain and the fret must be faced over again. Or look at the boundless ambition which possesses godless men; honours achieved only whet their appetite for more. We need not assume that the ambition is unworthy; all we have to notice is its insatiability; in politics, in literature, in art, in social distinction, it is like Sheol and Abaddon,—a maw that ever opens; a gulf that can swallow anything and everything, yet never be filled. The LXX. addition† seems to regard this uncontrolled desire as the mark of deficient culture; and, spiritually speaking, no doubt it is. Men without God are always uncultured; they have not found the centre of their being, they have not procured the key-stone to their accumulated knowledge, and it is, in consequence, not an arch through which they can travel to any goal, but a confused pile which blocks the way. These desperate strivings and loud-tongued, undisciplined desires are an abomination to the Lord, because they mar His mighty plan and introduce disorder where He intended order, discord where He intended harmony, deformity where He intended beauty. They are the work of egoism instead of theism.

It is needless to dwell upon the heart-sores and the disappointments which fall to the lot of the people whom we are thinking of. What ghastly mockery the morrows on which they counted prove to be! In some lonely and rocky island, girdled by the moaning of the dreary seas, and cut off from all the interests which gave to life its excitement, egotism ends its days. Or it is on some restless couch, surrounded by all the outward trappings of wealth and power, that the dying spirit cries, "My kingdom for an inch of time!" The man who by his brilliant genius has drawn all his generation after him passes, bearing "through Europe the pageant of his bleeding heart," to a hopeless grave. The woman who has achieved the end of her ambition, ruling the courts of fashion, the acknowledged queen of salons, ends her days with a sense of frustration, cynical in her contempt for the world which was foolish enough to follow and admire her.

But, on the other hand, here is one who boasts himself in God.

"Lord, it belongs not to my care,"

is the language of his spirit,

"Whether I die or live;

To love and serve Thee is my share,

And that Thy grace must give."

The first thing that strikes you in him is his perfect peace. His mind is stayed on God. The future has no terrors for him, nor has it any joys. God is all in all to him, and God is his now. His treasure is in possession, and moth and rust do not corrupt it, nor can thieves break through or steal. To say that he is contented seems too mild a term for so positive and joyous a calm. But in contrast with the discontent Oscar L. Joseph, *The Expositor's Bible: Psalms to Isaiah*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, vol. 3, Expositor's Bible (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton Co., 1903).

which prevails everywhere outside of God, it is worth while to dilate on this passive virtue of contentment. That endless worry about little things has ceased; he is not annoyed because some one fails to recognise him; he is not affected by the malicious or scandalous things which are said about him: he is not anxious for human recognition, and is therefore never distressed because others are more courted than he is; he knows nothing of that malignant passion of jealousy which is worse than the cruelty of wrath and the flooding of anger;* he does not want wealth and he does not dread poverty. He says:—

“Some have too much, yet still do crave;

I little have, and seek no more:

They are but poor though much they have,

And I am rich with little store:

They poor, I rich; they beg, I give;

They lack, I leave; they pine, I live.”†

When we have entered into this Divine content and are made by our absolute trust in God free from care for the future, it is wonderful how quick we become to see good in apparent evils. To the world this is so incredible that it suspects insincerity, but there is nothing more sincere and more real. A poor child who was blind found the greatest blessing in the affliction, saying, “You see, I can give more to the Missionary Society than the other children, because I can knit in the dark, and have not to spend money on candles.” You go to one of God’s children expecting to find him broken down and rebellious under some great and undeserved calamity, but you find that he has discovered a blessing in the loss before you get there, and is actually rejoicing, or at any rate he is replying to all provocations, “The Lord gave and the Lord took away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” He is afflicted, but you cannot think of him as afflicted, for “all the days of the afflicted are evil, but he that is of a cheerful spirit hath a continual feast.”‡

Yes, it is that illusive and imaginary morrow that robs us of our peace; it is the misgiving, the anxious care, the dark foreboding. But when we put God our Father in place of the morrow, and know that He comprehends and sees all that we have need of, the peace which passes all understanding settles down upon our spirit, and steals into our eyes, and breathes on our lips, and men perceive even in us why our Father is called “the God of Peace.”

The second thing which strikes us in those who have learnt to make their boast in God rather than in the morrow is the service which they render to their fellows. This is not only because they are able to turn their undivided attention to the duty which lies nearest, and to do with all their heart what their hand finds to do, but the very spirit of serenity in which they live is a constant help and blessing to all who are around them. It may have been given to you to come into contact with such a soul; in his presence your restlessness dies away, it seems as if your burning brow had been touched with a soothing hand; perhaps “with half-open eyes you were treading the borderland dim ’twixt vice and virtue,” and that quiet spirit seemed like a clear shaft of the dawn revealing where you trod; perhaps you were heart-broken with a great sorrow, and the restfulness and confidence of that strong soul gave you an

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indefinable consolation, hope broke into your heart, and even joy. In receiving that help from what the man *was* rather than from what he gave, you became aware that this was the highest service that any human being can render to another. It is a great thing to succour the physical and material sufferings of men; it is a greater to bring them clear truths and to give them some stimulus and guidance in the intellectual life; but it is greatest of all to communicate spiritual sustenance and power, for that means to bring souls into actual and conscious contact with God.

One of the noblest examples of this service to humanity is furnished in the life and the writings of St. Paul. His personal presence became the new creation of that ancient heathen civilisation, and countless individual souls were, through the inner life which he presented, brought to a complete change and made new creatures in Christ. His writings have been, ever since he died, a constant source of life and strength to many generations of men. He has been misunderstood, “the ignorant and unstedfast have wrested” what he wrote, but none the less he has been to the Church a perpetual regenerator, and, as a great writer* of our own day has declared, “The doctrine of Paul will arise out of the tomb where for centuries it has lain covered; it will edify the Church of the future; it will have the consent of happier generations, the applause of less superstitious ages.” Now what is the secret of this power? It is given in his own words, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”† He was able to Hing himself with that passionate temerity into the present duty, he was able to preach the word with that victorious vigour in season and out of season, just because the whole burden of the unknown future was rolled away from him, and he, more than any man that ever lived, understood what it is to live just for to-day.

Every Christian may possess the same secret; it is the open secret of the Sermon on the Mount; as our gracious Lord told us, we may be as the lilies of the field and as the birds of the air, without anxiety or misgiving, knowing that our Heavenly Father cares for us. It is not given to us all to be great philanthropists, great reformers, great preachers, but it is put within the reach of all to render to others the sweet service of abiding always in trustful and loving submission to God’s will, and of shedding upon all the light of our peace.

And this leads us to notice one *last feature* of this true spiritual life. It has an honour of its own, though it is not an earthly honour; it has a reward, though it is not a material reward, “Whoso keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof, and he that waiteth on his master eats of the honour.”† That is a saying which can only apply in a very modified degree to earthly service and human masters. How many loyal servants of kings have been deserted by their lords at the critical moment, and left to eat the fruit of disgrace and ignominy! But the saying applies in its fulness to our Master Christ and His service. Think of the Christian life under this simple figure; it is like the careful cultivation of the fruit tree. He is the Vine. Our sole concern is to keep in touch with Him, to sit at His feet, to watch for His fruit, to see that no other concern disturbs the quiet relation of perfect loyalty and devotion to Him. Our aim is not to do our own business or seek our own ends, but to be sure that we are always awake to His purposes and obedient to the demands which He makes upon us. It is not ours to reason why, but it is ours to do at all costs whatsoever He bids us do to-day. We have nothing to do with to-morrow; we have no responsibility for the fruit, for no fruit-bearing power lies in us. All we have to do is to keep the fig tree. Now when we abide in this concentrated and whole-hearted devotion to our Master,—when for us to live is Christ,—then honour comes to us unsought, but not unwelcome. The fruit of service is to the taste of the true servant the highest honour that he can imagine. We need no apocalyptic vision to assure us. His word is enough, confirmed as it is by a constant and growing experience. The servants of our Lord Oscar L. Joseph, *The Expositor’s Bible: Psalms to Isaiah*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, vol. 3, Expositor’s Bible (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton Co., 1903).

already stand before Him, holding in their hands the talents which they have gained for Him; already they hear His gracious "Well done," and the sound of it is more musical in their ears than all the acclamations of their fellow-creatures. This is their honour; what could they have more? they are counted one with Christ; they shared His travail, and now they share His satisfaction and his joy.

And thus those who make their boast in God, and do not boast of the morrow, find that the morrow itself becomes clear to them in the light of His countenance; they do in a sense know what it will bring forth: it will bring forth what they desire, for it will bring forth their Father's will; it will bring forth the victory and the glory of Christ. "Henceforth ye shall see Him coming in the clouds of heaven." Is not that enough? When our hearts have learnt to hanker only after God's will, to desire only Christ's victory, they may boast themselves even of to-morrow; for to-morrow holds in its bosom an assurance of blessing and joy.