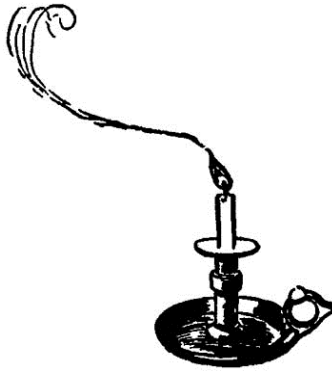


THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Tim. 2-19

Vol. 13 No. 1 – JANUARY 2016



Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in
the house.

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

It is our prayer that each one of you have made an effort this past year to walk more closely with the Lord through spending more time in studying the Scriptures, either on a personal basis or as a family where appropriate, and in that process your heart has been open to the leading of the Holy Spirit as we find our way in this world of growing spiritual darkness, an ever increasing rejection of God by many and the adoption of a lifestyle by others that can only be called what God calls it and that is an abomination.

We have heard it said that times have changed and we no longer need to abide or even accept that there is a God who created all things, a God who created man in His image, male and female He created them, and that He is also the One who has set immutable standards for mankind.

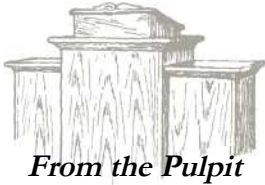
We have been much encouraged this past year with reading and hearing God's word on a regular basis from godly men of the past and present and continue our walk with Christ with a sincere desire to live as His word calls us to even though some may wonder why we have rejected so many attractions the world offers and must confess we took part of before we answered the call of Jesus to be born again and walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

The Word of God is our daily bread, it offers and gives life to all who partake of it so that we can be those whom the Father seeketh as we worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23)

Worship involves our whole being, Jesus calls us to love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind (Matthew 22:37) He is leaving nothing out and if we are to claim to love the Lord our God we cannot leave anything part of ourselves out either so that we can attain to the blessing pronounced by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:23: I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is our prayer for each one not just for this coming year but for every day that the Lord may grant each one before He calls us to account for each idle word (Matthew 12:36) and reward us according to our works (Matthew 16:27)

Part of our worship of God is expressing ourselves in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs both personally and collectively – Ephesians 5:9, Colossians 3:16, for those who desire more encouragement in that area the following web link is to scripture in song <http://sing.thekjv.org/> a further link of interest explaining God's gift of music is at www.musiccamp.info J.v.L.



From the Pulpit

Materialism — The Foolish Rich Man
From a sermon by James Nolt
Orchardville Mennonite Church 2005

I would invite you to turn with me to Luke 12.

Our subject is looking at the foolish rich man and noticing the idea of materialism and just a few things about the context in which we find this parable. We notice in the setting here in Luke 12:1–4, Jesus reproving the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and mentioning how there will be a time when everything that is hidden will be revealed. Things that may be hidden in men’s lives will be exposed. I think that is an applicable truth as we think about the threat of materialism. It is something that is hard to detect and to determine. It is something that is within.

Also then in verses 5–9, we have Jesus enlarging on the divine providence of God, the overshadowing providence of God. In verses 10–12, the work of the Holy Spirit and the seriousness of working against or rejecting the work of the Spirit. Then we have this question put to Jesus in verse 13, “And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.”

It seems to be a rather rude interruption. Jesus had been sharing some rather profound and deep thoughts in the previous discourse and it seems to me that as soon as he had an opportunity, this man poses this question: “Master, speak to my brother.” it was a matter about the inheritance, an inheritance question. I have felt that probably, he was being short changed and not getting his share and that is a possibility that this man in his dealings with his brother was being short changed and so he appeals to Jesus for help and consideration.

I think there is also another possibility. We know that the Jewish law said that the first born son would receive double portion of his father’s goods. Had this man possibly heard Jesus when He said, “It hath been said, but I say unto you?” And did he think that perhaps he could have more than his share? Was he the younger brother and he was appealing to the Master here, to use His authority and approach his brother about dividing the inheritance equally. We do not know that for sure, but it is interest-

ing to ponder and I think it does help us glimpse this man's heart and where his interests lay.

Materialism — it is something that we must all guard against this aspect of being covetous and materialistic. It is a sin which can be hard to detect. It springs from an inner problem, an inner motivation, our innermost thoughts and desires. Yes, sometimes it may be evident on the outside. But it is a very subjective thing not necessarily can we always look at what a person has and say that they are materialistic. Not necessarily, even though the Scriptures do warn again and again of the perils of being rich and accumulating wealth and the many dangers that accompany it but it does spring from a matter of the heart.

Perhaps we could think about contentment. I think I see these two as opposites. Covetousness, materialism or being content. And maybe we need to check ourselves sometimes. If we get what we want what we're pursuing, are we content then, or do we want more? And so it indicates an inner desire, an inner struggle. And we know that there are those that the Scriptures speak about that suppose that gain is godliness. Paul turns that around and he says, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." (1 Timothy 6:6)

This is something that we all need to guard against we all tend toward this. I think it is no use that we fool ourselves it is a tendency that we all face. Further, as we think of the matter of materialism we know that the Scriptures teach our responsibility and accountability. We are stewards of the things, the gifts that He has given us. We are accountable how we use them and we are accountable to use them wisely and for a profit, to be diligent. And so we have that aspect.

We also understand from the Scriptures from our dealings with material things, they are to be governed by fairness and honesty and integrity. The Scriptures indicate that. And as we look at this rich man in this parable today, I believe that we can conclude that he could have well been faithful in these first two areas. He was diligent. There was profitability. There was increase. We have no indication that he was not fair in how he went about accumulating that which he had. But we also recognize that the Scriptures hold us accountable for how we use the things that we have. And even though this person passed in the first two areas, I believe he failed in the third. We note that he used them selfishly.

This question brought to Jesus was “Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.” Jesus responded He said unto him, “Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?” (verse 14) Then he shares this parable of the foolish rich man. And we would like to read that now beginning at verse 15. Luke 12:15-21 “And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

We would like to in the remaining part of the message to simply learn some lessons from this rich fool in this parable. We would like to notice first of all some of the mistakes that he made so that we might be fortified against making the same mistakes, then a few things in conclusion.

First of all, I would share this observation as we think of the mistakes that he made.

1) It appears that he was taken up with the gifts and forgot the giver. We see nowhere in this account any recognition of the divine, any recognition of God. But it is all him and his goods. We do not see a hint of thankfulness to God, or recognition of His blessing. Rather, there appears to be an attitude of selfish arrogance where the “I” stands out again and again. This man in the parable Jesus gives here was a farmer and what occupation is so closely dependent and related on the blessing of God as farming? No reflection on farmers. I think we all admire what it takes to be a farmer today. But, we do have to admit that there is no occupation that is so closely tied to divine providence. This man was a farmer. He had ample opportunity to see the witness and work of God, the blessing of God upon his labours. Does he acknowledge God for it? We do not see any hint of that. Yes, his work, his labours were blessed, but not a hint of thankfulness do

we see coming from his lips. Not a hint of acknowledgment. But rather it seems to be that “by my own strength, and by the strength of mine own arm have I gotten these things.

What about the challenge for us? Stop and ponder for a minute all the gifts that you have all the gifts that God has given you. We have loving partners in life, we have our children, our families, our friends. We have our homes. We have our material possessions, material goods. Have we become absorbed in these blessings to the point that we have excluded the giver? Do we have time for personal worship? For public worship? For godly service? For expressions of thankfulness to God for His blessing upon our lives? Yes, we enjoy these things that God has blessed us with, but they ought to be drawing our hearts and our minds to Him. And we should be expressing those thoughts of thankfulness, those attitudes of thankfulness to Him.

2) *We notice from these verses here, that covetousness begins in the heart.* Verse 17 says, “And he thought within himself.” He was condemned, not for what he did, he had not even done these things yet, but for what he purposed and thought to do. He said, “This will I do,” and God brought condemnation. It was because of the attitude of his heart. It began there. It began within. God knew the thoughts within his heart and He knows the thoughts within ours too. He knows our goals and our motivations in life — what is driving us. God knows all of that. And it is where we need to be on guard it is where this attraction for materialism, this covetousness for the things of this world begins. It begins in the heart.

What about us? What are our goals and aspirations in life? Pay off the farm? Pay off the barns, the buildings? Then things will be easier. Then we will be able to give to the Lord. Then we will be able to serve our neighbours. And there will be time then in order to serve and to do. Very seldom does that happen because one gets caught in the web of continuing to seek more and more. And so, we need to continue to have our priorities right at all times. Yes, there is a sense of obligation, when we need to recognize that to return that which we have borrowed and that is right. But, there needs to be time for service and time for giving as well. The Scriptures tell us, “they that will be rich,” that is the desire “they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.” 1 Timothy 6:9. This

begins in the heart. it begins within us. It is there that the seeds are planted and the expressions carried out in life.

3) *We notice from this parable that material abundance brings cares and anxiety.* I note that in verse 17, as well. This man faced a dilemma. He said, “What shall I do?” It was perplexing to him. He was faced with a situation that was causing him some distress because of the multiplicity of the things that he was blessed with. “What shall I do?” It was dilemma. It was a situation in which he found himself and in which he felt pressured to do something. And it is a very real truth of materialism. It increases the pressure. It brings cares and anxiety — bigger barns bring bigger cares. The more we have the more there is to maintain and secure. The more there is to lose or to worry about losing. Scriptures tell us that “the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.” Ecclesiastes 5:12. And so it is a truth. It is a lesson that we see from the parable of this rich man.

4) *We notice also that he was presumptuous in his outlook.* And we see that in the verses here and in his planning and then how quickly in verse 20, as God steps into the picture and He says, “Thou fool, this night . . .” This man was presumptuous. And materialism has that way of doing that for us. We tend to feel confident and self-sufficient; we tend to think that we are able to handle whatever comes. Well, let us stop and think a little bit. Why were his barns big enough before? If several lean years followed, what then? Would he be faced with some big, empty barns? He thought he had plenty for many years but what if there was no return at all. Had he figured that, had he calculated on that? No, he was a bit presumptuous, very presumptuous.

And it is a challenge that we all face too. Many of us, most of us really know nothing but prosperous times. Yes, there have been the ups and downs. There have been times that the livestock markets have been bad and there are times that the grain markets are low. And times that the chicken and turkey prices are down. Those are the ups and downs, but generally if we have held on we have found a way. We have come through and we can again continue on. But basically most of us, all of us really have known nothing but prosperity. Will it always be so? I think not. I am not a doomsday crier but we recognize that sooner or later, these things

come to an end. And sooner or later this world and all that it involves will be burned up, will be destroyed.

We are reminded sometimes in stark ways, how quickly the things that we have can disappear and change. Situations can change. I thought back to our experience about a year-and-a half ago when we were awakened early one morning with a popping, cracking sound. And looking out the window we saw our old barn in flames. Running out of the house I was sure that I could at least pull some of the equipment out. The barn doors were open, the skid loader was sitting right inside, and as I approached the barn I saw I was too late. The heat of the flames were so intense, it would have been foolish to go close. And so we turned back. And I can still remember the comment my son made as we stood together there on the lawn and watched helplessly as it became a towering inferno in a matter of minutes. He said, "Dad, it is all gone." And it was all gone. There was very little salvaged. How quickly these things can change. And so we tend to become presumptuous in our outlook.

But let us recognize that these things are not going to be here forever these things can be taken away very quickly. And so we need to factor that in as we think of this idea of materialism and the threat that it is to us. Really, the day of prosperity is probably a greater test for us than the day of adversity. It probably is.

5) Further, as we think of lessons that we observe from this rich man he failed to understand the need of his soul. And I take that from his expression there in verse 19 where he says, "I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease." He failed to recognize that man's deepest need was a spiritual one. He was somehow figuring and thinking that these material things would bring peace and fulfillment and satisfaction in life. And they never can do that. Material things can never meet the deepest needs of our life. They just cannot do that and will not do that. Man's deepest need is a spiritual one and can never be satisfied with things. Things cannot bring contentment or fulfillment, but sometimes we fall into the trap of thinking that they can.

For the youth, maybe you are looking forward to getting a car. And you think, finally now that you have that car, "Ah, I have what I want. And I will be satisfied. This will bring fulfillment." No, it will not. Or, we can think of owning a house, or building a house, or buying a farm or remodel-

ling the house or whatever. We can fall in the trap of anticipating. Sometimes I have found already in our natural life we look ahead and we want to do things and accomplish things and it is right that we do, but we can fall into the trap of thinking that as we accumulate these things or do these things or acquire these things, that somehow it is going to bring us happiness and fulfilment. But it never does and it never can and it never will. Our deepest need is a spiritual need and it can only be found through Jesus Christ.

6) *We notice that he was selfish.* As it relates to his material things he thought only of himself and forgot his neighbour. Notice the references to “I” and “my” throughout this parable. And it strikes us as very similar to the rich man in Luke 16 where we do not know that he had committed any gross sin, but that man he woke up in hell because there was an opportunity to share with his fellow man right at his door step which he neglected. He neglected. He failed to avail himself of the opportunity to help his fellow man. So we see in this parable here it was all for him. It was all for himself. It was all to give him years of selfish pleasure. And so a lesson that we need to learn is to be aware of selfishness.

7) *Lastly we note from this account that in thinking and planning for this life, he forgot the next.* And this afternoon, I would like to challenge us with that thought. We will be extremely short-sighted if we allow the involvement and the pursuit of material things to be our goal and rob us of the spiritual preparation that we need for the life beyond. We will be extremely short sighted. We will not recognize that we are indeed a pauper as we come to the end of this life. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” And then Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:19–21. Treasures are what one values. And when we use the material things that we have, in a way to serve God, in a way to serve our fellow men, that is a way to actually use these material things that will lay up for us enduring and everlasting treasures.

In conclusion what is our response to this man’s mistakes? We can look at him and we can readily see where he failed. He made some rather serious mistakes, did he not? But, will we learn from them? Can we learn

from them? This man needed to learn in eternity what he failed to learn in time. What about us. We are still here in time, if these material things have become our goal, if we have been or are materialistic in our outlook and selfish in our pursuit of things, we still have the opportunity to amend our ways. It is still possible for us to change our course. Will we fail as this man did? Fail to learn the lessons that we need to learn in time.

The opportunity is here that we can still change, we can amend our ways. I would like to note now Jesus' answer as we think of the conclusion of these lessons that we might learn here in Luke 12:22-30 where Jesus says where He encourages us not to be overly anxious or concerned with material needs but to trust in divine providence. That is an aspect which we need to keep in mind. As we think about the threat of becoming materialistic, and allowing materialism to rob us our spiritual goal, Jesus says, "take no thought for your life," be not overly concerned, overly anxious about the material but trust in God's care. As I noted earlier, in verses 31–34, we have Jesus mentioning the possibility of using these material things rightly to lay up enduring and eternal treasures.

Then finally in verse 35–40, we need to live with a sense of awareness of our Lord's return and of the uncertainty of life. I think as we face the challenges of relating to these material things, that is one aspect that we ever need to keep before us. Anticipating, living in anticipation — a sense of awareness of our Lord's return and of the uncertainty of life. We know this man here in this parable, the question was asked him, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." the question then came, "then whose shall those things be? it is a question that we do well to ponder as well. It is another lesson that we learn from this parable. When we die, when we pass from this life we can take nothing with us. The question was put to this man "then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" When we die, when we leave the scenes of time, we will leave all these material things behind. Job said it this way (in my own words) "Naked I came into this world, and so shall I leave." (Job 1:21) He will leave with nothing.

So may God help us as we relate to these material things from day to day, they have a way of winning themselves into the affection of our hearts. May God help us to be aloof enough that we may have used these things as though we possess them not, 1 Corinthians 7:3

Beginning a series of 7 short articles on Creation & Evolution published in The Messenger of Truth - Used by permission Gospel Publishers Moundridge Kansas.

[**Messenger of Truth Editor's Note:** Beginning with the following writing, a series of articles on creation and related issues will be published from time to time. They are written by Bro. Sumner S. Loomis and have formed the bases of lectures and presentations that he has given in various congregations. Growing up in a rather unusual home setting of atheism and Pentecostalism, Bro. Loomis spent a number of tumultuous years, beginning in 1961, searching for God and the truth. As a result, he was converted in 1969 at the age of thirty-two. Sometime later he was baptized into the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite. He has written these contributions with conviction and from the vantage point of his experience and knowledge in various scientific fields.]

1. WHY WE SHOULD STUDY ABOUT EVOLUTION

"Be ready to give an answer ..." 1 Peter 3:15

The theory of evolution is completely contrary to Bible teaching, and the objective of most evolutionists is to overthrow the biblical truth about creation. In studies like this one, the question often surfaces, "Why do the supposedly wise and educated of society take this stand?" There may be many answers, but most of them can be reduced to the desire for fleshly freedom. A common retort of the evolutionist is that Christianity is a strait-jacket. In other words, it is too confining and contrary to the way he wants to live.

If we could back up in time about sixty years, we would find that the idea of evolution was little known. It was cultured by a somewhat isolated group of people who mostly kept their ideas within their circles. I started college in the mid-fifties and several of my professors would quietly drop the idea in class that if you had a reasonable degree of intelligence, you would surely find religion to be a dumb and outmoded practice. In my second year of college, my major professor made a practice of trying to publicly embarrass any student who took a stand for Christ.

Today, evolution teaching has taken a strong stand in the public eye and is generally being forced upon students in classes from the fifth grade and up in public schools. Many teachers are quick to explain that the Bible stories are just nice stories, and science has proven the Bible to be an impos-

sible, illogical, and self-conflicting collection of writings from an age of ignorance. Many of the books and magazines that propagate these ideas are making their way into our homes and may influence our perception of world history.

The supporters of evolution theory, although rapidly and shakily changing their story, have had about one hundred fifty years to come up with some very convincing arguments. For anyone with a weak foundation in his beliefs, the reasoning of evolutionists can be very appealing. Acceptance of such teachings is strongly aided by the inborn tendency of humans to take their own way (sometimes called "freedom," which, contrarily, it is not). The risk to professing Christians (and their children) is so great that it is important to know the errors of such teaching in order to withstand its deception.

We are admonished in 1 Peter 3:15, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

My experience is that many of those who question your faith and reply with counter arguments are driven by a cry in their hearts for a real reason to reject atheism. It has been said that mankind was created with a severe deficiency: everyone has an intense need to recognize and serve his or her Creator. Some of these people have an intense spirit of argument, however, and are seeking the cheap reward of overwhelming another person. The Christian should never partake of this form of self-satisfaction.

Seeking answers to the mysteries of creation and God's purpose for our lives is excellent Christian exercise, as is any form of Bible study based on a desire to know God and His truth. Psalm 1:2 points out, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law cloth he meditate day and night." An honest desire to know and understand God's directions (His Word) for our lives will surely be rewarded with a closer walk and commitment to Him. This is God's desire and purpose for us.

Be assured that there are reasonable and accurate answers available for any challenges presented by the world. If you have questions or doubts, or lack an answer, do not hesitate to take the matter to God in prayer. James 1:5 reads, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." It is also reasonable to involve your brethren and even your church staff in your quest for knowledge.

~ Sumner S. Loomis ~

Preparing the Way to Forsaking All

In our everyday affairs, we recognize the importance of preparation for projects we undertake. We find that investing time and money pays off in the future. Whether it is a garden, a field of grain, or a building, the beauty of the end result depends on good preparation.

Our spiritual lives are like that. John the Baptist's message to his contemporaries reminds us of this basic truth, for it prepared the people for the New Testament era. Today, two thousand years later, his message still reminds us that a way must be prepared for us to know God and experience salvation.

We see part of this “Preparing the Way to Forsaking All” in the Gospel of Luke:

Luke 3:1-14 ¹ Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, ² Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. ³ And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways *shall be* made smooth; ⁶ And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. ⁷ Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. ⁹ And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. ¹⁰ And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? ¹¹ He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. ¹² Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? ¹³ And he said unto

them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. ¹⁴ And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse *any* falsely; and be content with your wages.

Rome reached the height of its power during a time known as the Pax Romano (Roman Peace), which lasted from 27 B.C. to A.D. 180. No country was strong enough to threaten the empire during this period, and so the period was a time of peace.

The Jews, chafing under the rule of Rome, were eagerly hoping for deliverance. They felt they desperately needed a leader to help them rally their resources and inspire them with new courage. The scriptural promises of a coming deliverer only served to reinforce this hope. Many times through their tumultuous history God had delivered them from the rule of enemy nations through great leaders. Surely He would do so again. This was the general mind set of the nation. Their vision of what they needed was quite defined and focused on the secular realm.

While all this was happening on the civil and political scene, something else was about to happen on the spiritual scene, something deeper and greater. Mankind was at the threshold of the transition from the Old Testament era to the New. This was the setting into which John the Baptist entered with his message to repent. He told the people to prepare the way of the Lord and declared that the valleys should be filled, the mountains lowered, and the crooked straightened. People flocked to hear him, and he spoke to them in a personal and specific way. He had a pertinent word of advice to individuals who questioned him. He spoke of salvation for all. His encouragement was to get to the root of the problem.

The response of the people varied. A few believed John's message and listened to his advice. They repented under his preaching and were baptized by him. Many felt reproved and resisted his message. Though they were unprepared to simply accept the message he brought, they were attracted to his preaching and baptism.

As we examine the account of John, various questions come to mind. The soldiers who approached John, were they Romans? Was this an early instance of gentiles seeking God? We wonder about John's advice to the soldiers considering the doctrine of nonresistance as we understand it. Why didn't he simply tell them to leave the army and become Jews? What was

the meaning of telling his listeners to share their material things with the poor? Was this something they had neglected to do?

We wonder to what extent John the Baptist himself understood the significance of the message God gave him to deliver to the people. What did John believe in his own heart about the coming Messiah? Did John realize the full import of the change that was about to occur?

Many of the people in John's day had difficulty accepting his message. They flocked to hear him but concluded that he had a devil. Maybe we can understand their perplexity to a degree. His message did not conform to their mindset. Their hearts needed some form of preparation before they could accept John's message. The transition from the Old Testament era to the New would require soft hearts.

We are sometimes warned of the danger of drifting or that we may already be in a drift. It may be that the Lord is seeking the fruit of a change of course in our lives. Perhaps He is calling for a turn in my life. I may have to identify the nature of the drift I am in, as well as the wrong direction in which it is taking me. I may have to identify with John's listeners who were stuck in a rut. Evidently they needed to change, but do I? Have I been serving Him to the best of my ability? Why should I change my course? I read my Bible regularly. I tithe faithfully. I love my wife. I attend church every Sunday. My father and grandfather were Christians, and I have been a Christian for years now. The language of my heart may sound a lot like the angel of the Laodicean church as recorded in Revelation 3:17. He claimed riches, fullness, and self-sufficiency.

Could it be that as a church member I have been lulled into a spiritual sleep by false assurances drawn from Satan's sly suggestions and my own thoughts? I may be far from alone in my dilemma and feel consoled with the thought that I am just like the rest. Perhaps the Lord is gently and mercifully calling me to a real change of course in my life. It is up to me to make the necessary changes by the grace of God; then I can experience the fullness of life He came to give.

My old ways, however good morally, socially, and religiously, lack power to save my soul. My need of Jesus as my personal Savior is hid from my eyes as long as I find my consolation in thoughts about my goodness. In essence I am bound under the law, fallen from grace, and am become a debtor to do the whole law. Paul puts a strong judgment on such a condition when he writes in Galatians 3:10, "For as many as are of the works of

the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

The call to repentance is for all. Whether male or female, rich or poor, young or old, black or white, repentance is effective in preparing the way for Christ's coming into the heart.

The response to this call is a decision each individual needs to make and then and only then will we be able to consider what it is that Christ is calling us to and make a commitment to that call which Jesus repeatedly gives us to forsake all and to take up the cross daily and follow Him, it is "Forsaking All" for His sake. Luke 9:23.

Surely as His disciples should it not be our desire to be able to say with the Apostle Paul as he did in in [Philippians 3:7-14](#):

⁷ But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, ⁹ And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: ¹⁰ That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; ¹¹ If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. ¹² Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, ¹⁴ I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Jesus repeatedly instructs us that anyone who does not forsake houses, lands, wife, husband, children and all that he has cannot be His disciple. it's all or nothing. There is no middle ground on which we can safely stand. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that we examine ourselves honestly as to whether we really have forsaken all to follow Jesus. Imagine standing before the Great Judge only to discover, too late, that our love was secretly set on earthly things. "And if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God

shall reveal even this unto you" (Philippians 3:15).

In Luke 5 and Luke 14 Jesus does not mince His words or just mutter platitudes to please His listeners and His words have not changed to this day nor ever will and now note the call that He makes to those who are considering following Him in those verses:

Luke 5:27-32: ²⁷ And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. ²⁸ And he left all, rose up, and followed him. ²⁹ And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. ³⁰ But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? ³¹ And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. ³² I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

And:

Luke 14:26-33: ²⁶ If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish *it*? ²⁹ Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish *it*, all that behold *it* begin to mock him, ³⁰ Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. ³¹ Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? ³² Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. ³³ So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

It is generally accepted that the Levi mentioned here is the same as Matthew who wrote the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew's response to the invitation of Jesus was an example of how we should respond—he left all, rose up, and followed Him. Many blessings are missed because of a hesitancy to follow when the invitation to be a disciple of Christ is extended.

It appears that Matthew's friends were of questionable character. However, he evidently was not ashamed to show them the new direction his life was taking and to acquaint them with his new Master. No doubt, he thought they could benefit from His teachings as well.

The scribes and Pharisees were critical of Jesus for eating with publicans and sinners.

Following are some observations made by Adam Clark about the pharisaic attitude:

- (1) They are more busied in censoring the conduct of others than in rectifying their own.
- (2) They desire that everyone should regulate his piety by theirs, and embrace their particular customs and forms of devotion.
- (3) They speak and compare themselves with other people only that they may have opportunity to distinguish and exalt themselves.”

However, Jesus wanted them to know that sinners were just the ones He came to save. He seeks to communicate the same message to us. When it seems that we are so sinful that God surely would not hear us, we can take comfort—we are the very ones He came to save.

The word hate ([Luke 14:26](#)) does not mean hatred in the ordinary sense of the word, but simply that we are to have Jesus far ahead of all other things.

Jesus uses the illustration of counting the cost before building a tower. Following this, He speaks of forsaking all. Thus as one contemplates Jesus Christ, it is important to calculate the cost first. And what is the price? It is "all that he hath." It is a requisite in following Christ that we fully understand the cost of discipleship and are prepared to make a full commitment. At the same time, we need to understand that this only meets the conditions of salvation and does not make a payment for salvation.

The implication seems to include that discipleship is so demanding that if we have not totally freed ourselves of all we hold dear, we simply will not qualify to be His disciple. We will again be overtaken by the things that we love and will become like the man who built a tower and was not able to finish it.

Thus we need to be aware, before we begin the Christian journey, that we are destined to failure in this effort unless we completely deny ourselves of our own desires and make knowing, loving, and obeying Jesus the whole purpose of our lives.

When a king realizes that he cannot defend himself against an enemy, his

only option is to throw himself on the mercy of the aggressor and accept whatever terms and demands that he makes. In other words he surrenders everything. Likewise, we must accept the terms of peace God has laid out for us—we must forsake all that we have.

What does it really mean to "forsake all" in our affluent setting? Our family members encourage us to be Christians. Our governments do not persecute or oppress us because of our religion. We have fine houses, vehicles, and clothes along with many labor-saving conveniences. None of these are in jeopardy because of our profession of Christianity. What, then, is the tangible evidence that we have truly forsaken all to follow Christ? The martyrs knew where they stood. They counted the cost. They had to, because they knew that their commitment could easily mean the loss of all that they possessed, including their family and even their own lives. A Christian simply will not profess to be a Christian under these circumstances unless he has truly "forsaken all." Consequently there are few, if any, halfhearted Christians during times of persecution.

However, when we live in times of affluence and religious freedom, the concept of "forsaking all" acquires a different context altogether. In these circumstances, we do not think about the prospect of having our goods taken away from us. We do not feel in any way threatened for being a Christian. As a result, the cost of discipleship becomes more difficult to calculate. Thus we may assume that we have left all when we have not truly done so. By this method, halfhearted or less than fully dedicated church members can become the rule rather than the exception. Something down deep inside, however, reminds us that God's standard remains the same in all circumstances. It is still all or nothing.

How does a person "forsake all" if he lives in affluence and comfort? How do we know that we have indeed done so when much of what we have "forsaken" is still in our possession?

Every man must decide how he will make a living. When choosing a vocation in earlier times, it seemed brethren were influenced mostly by a concern for what was conducive to good Christian living and healthy family life. Is it possible that in our times an important consideration is how much money can be made and whether the vocation suits our fancy? Does "forsaking all" include choosing a vocation which provides an atmosphere and lifestyle more conducive to Christian living and good family life, even

if it is harder, more unpleasant work, and even if it means giving up a higher living standard and the pleasing of the flesh? Thus a man may not be willing to give up the enjoyment and high pay of his occupation for one that would be more pleasing to God, yet by comparing himself with others he is convinced that he has "forsaken all" to follow Christ.

Have you ever considered that God is asking you to forsake all the demands that peer pressure places upon you? God is not looking for people who follow the crowd. But what delights God is a person who has purposed in his heart to follow Him in humble obedience even if no one else does.

We should not feel that God is unreasonable in asking us to sell out. After all, were we not created by Him and for His pleasure? Is this not the sole reason for our very existence in the first place? Thus a complete surrender of ourselves is but our reasonable service. (Romans 12:1) Our life is His, not our own. God is not just forcing something upon man because He delights in seeing mankind suffer and struggle. He is interested in our happiness. Therefore all that God requires, if obeyed, will surely increase our happiness.

Perhaps there is another reason why God will not accept anything other than a complete sellout. What God offers to man is something of infinite and eternal value. What we give up to attain godliness and eternal salvation are simply the worthless, beggarly elements of the world. In order to receive what God offers, we must separate ourselves from these worthless things which we use and handle in this world. This is like exchanging a few gold colored plastic trinkets for a whole ton of pure gold. As long as we still place value on our plastic trinkets, He will not give us the reward of the real gold.

Some promises from scriptures:

- Rest for the weary. "Come unto me ... and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).
- Freedom from guilt, fear and sin. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).
- Guidance in all of life's decisions. "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).
- Comfort to the sad, lonely and brokenhearted. "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation" (2 Corinthians 1:4).
- Joy. "That my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be

full" (John 15:11).

- Peace. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" (John 14:27).
- Hope for eternity. "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Hebrews 6:19).

Space keeps us from enumerating more of the blessings promised to the faithful but in closing let us ask ourselves a couple of questions and answer them based on God's word.

1] Will some be cast to the left hand side because they failed to recognize that they had not truly forsaken these earthly things?

2] Can earthly possessions and wealth, a large family, and good health be generally considered the reward for forsaking all?

Let us examine ourselves honestly that we may be found among the number of those who have surrendered all.



RECONCILIATION

In what direction does reconciliation move—from whom to whom? Taking Jesus' example as a basis, we must conclude that often the motivation wells up first in the innocent. It then overflows to the guilty. If one were to inquire of the old flesh, this would seem impossible, like water running uphill. But, again, one sees that God's way is not according to human reasoning.

"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" 2 Corinthians 5:19. Surely, the direction of this gracious action is from the guiltless to the guilty (1 Peter 3:18).

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" Romans 5:10. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (v. 8). In this light, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" takes on its fullest meaning.

Reconciliation is called for whenever two people are alienated. There is something between them that hinders or prevents free and open communication. Their spirits do not flow, and they are edgy and guarded when in one another's presence.

The first state or relationship that existed between the Creator and Adam and Eve was perfect. God and man were together. However, the account is well-known how this blessed state was drastically marred by sin. As the human family grew in numbers, the estrangement kept pace. Even after the great flood, with all the eight survivors being righteous, it was not long until the breach of fellowship between God and man reappeared. What was needed was a mediator to bring about a genuine heart reconciliation between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5).

With that in mind, God eventually gave the Law through Moses. But despite its influence unto holiness as well as the pleading of the prophets, there was no real coming together. But all the while, God was working toward reconciliation. He yearned for a restoration of that first state of communication with mankind. Through Isaiah, He said, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" Isaiah 1:18. David said, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" Psalm 103:8.

In the fulness of time, God made the ultimate move toward reconciliation. Considering His repeated overtures through the prophets, which were often spurned, God could have justly turned His back on man without further effort to reach them. Instead, He decided to go further than ever before. He would do more than just plead with divine words. He Himself would come to them, in Jesus Christ His Son, and become acquainted in a personal way with man's sin and rebellion. This becoming acquainted with fallen mankind was not just in knowledge but in actually letting Himself into experiencing man's grief and sorrow (Isaiah 53:3). In essence, the Son of God came to mankind and said, "I have come to take upon Myself the burden of the lack of fellowship between My Father and you."

One marvels at the divine mystery in the Apostle's words, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." And this mighty working was underway while we were yet sinners! The initiative of reconciliation was entirely on the Father's part.

In some areas of present-day Jerusalem, there exists a very unique and sad situation, as reported by a recent issue of *The National Geographic*. At places in the city, Jews and Arabs live side by side or just on different sides of the same streets, but yet they are worlds apart. They fear and distrust each other. Although in close proximity, they live "separately" by deliberately ignoring each other. There is never a "Good morning" or acknowledgement of any kind of one another's existence when they pass each other. They avert their eyes. This mind-set is so engrained that it's as though each does not exist. Neighbors may grow up together, live and die there, and never know one another's names. It's as though there is an impassable mental, social, and ethnic chasm running jaggedly through their midst. We would say these people need to be reconciled.

In this setting, it is unthinkable that a Jew living on one side of the street would cross over the great divide and introduce him or herself to the Arab stranger on the other side. Or vice versa. What would be the reaction of others, the consequences and implications of such a daring deed? If the person reaching out were to have any chance of success, it would need to be done out of recognition of the common ground of the human experience. The one "crossing over" would need to have love and compassion with a true desire to "know" the person on the other side of the street. "I want to meet you. I want to know who you are. I know how you feel. Can we talk together and be reconciled?" Simplistic, yes, but what if ...?

For all mankind, Christ Jesus "came over" to us to effect just such reconciliation. First He laid aside His heavenly garments of glory and majesty. He came to earth, taking upon Himself a body of flesh, being born of a virgin, Mary. With the exception of the temple incident (Luke 2:46), the Scriptures are silent on His childhood, adolescence, and early manhood. But the day came when He was baptized by John in the Jordan (Matthew 3:13-17). The Scriptures further comment, "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" Matthew 4:1.

In a sense, there in the wilderness the Son of God "crossed over" to us and became the Son of man. He experienced every facet of human experience, weakness, and temptation. The Word gives the only qualification to this, adding, "...yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). But when that extremely exhausting and stressful test was over, Jesus, the Son of man, could say, "I know you. I am your kinsman. I, too, have experienced what you're going through, and I feel for you. I'm come to take upon Myself your burden of

sin, the cause of the breach between My Father and you." In so doing, what a price He paid, but what grace He purchased!

The Son of man went all the way to Calvary to open the way for our reconciliation with the Father. He secured the state wherein, despite man's imperfections, there is nothing between us and our Father (Psalm 32:1-2). By faith in the work of Christ on the cross, we now can have peace with God (Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:8). The great grace, courage, and love required to "cross over to our side" and become one with us and suffer for us should never cease to inspire us.

Now God "hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" 2 Corinthians 5:19-20

Jesus pronounces a blessing on those who seek reconciliation with Him but also seek that with others and for others.

Romans 5:1:

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

Matthew 5:9:

Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

"In our manner of speech, our plans of living, our dealings with others, our conduct and walk in the church and out of it—all should be done as becomes the gospel" (Philippians 1:27).

—Albert Barnes



Compiled & Edited by: J van Loon

E-mail: shimara2@iprimus.com.au

Web: www.anabaptistmennonites.net