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## **PREOCCUPIED, DISTRACTED, ENTANGLED, CHOKED BY THE THINGS IN THE WORLD AND THE AFFAIRS OF THIS LIFE**

### **Easy to be preoccupied, distracted, entangled and choked by the things in the world and the affairs of this life**

The Scriptures teaches us that we are living in a fallen world, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. The Scriptures also teaches us that the world is passing away, that the earth and its works will be burned up, and that we should therefore concentrate on God's kingdom and what will endure. However, it is easy to be preoccupied, distracted, entangled and choked by the things in the world and the affairs of this life. Why is this so?

Let us look at 1 John 2:15-17.

#### **1 John 2:15-17**

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

The apostle John warns us against being drawn into the world because it is easy for us to be distracted and adversely affected by the things in this world. The whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). He is actively at work, influencing the trend and direction of the fallen world and the spirit of the world. That is why John tells us that "if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (v. 15). How much we love the world would reflect on the depth of our love for the Lord. If we are drawn into the world, our love for God will be adversely affected.

The world and all it contains are temporary and are passing away. But that which is of God has true value and will endure forever. We must therefore concentrate on the things of God and what is in God's heart for us. John makes this clear when he says: "The one who does the will of God lives forever" (v. 17).

The writer to the Hebrews sounds a similar warning:

**Hebrews 12:25-29**

25 See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.

26 And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven."

27 This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;

29 for our God is a consuming fire.

The writer points out that the things in the physical realm will be shaken. But certain things cannot be shaken and will remain. In verse 28, he says that "we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken". He follows up by urging us to offer to God a service that is acceptable. We are to serve God with reverence and awe, for it has a bearing on God's kingdom. Our service must be aligned with God's will. It is not simply getting ourselves busy with many activities, even Christian ones. Service that is unacceptable to God is like wood, hay and stubble, which cannot stand the test of fire.

In 2 Peter 3:10-12, the apostle Peter tells us "the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up".

**2 Peter 3:10-12**

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

Many things and activities in this world are visible, attention grabbing, and may appear important, but they have no lasting significance. They will all pass away. What are the implications for believers since all that is in the temporary realm will be destroyed? What then should we concentrate on? Holy conduct and godliness are

crucial (v. 11). We need to concentrate on developing inward qualities in our own lives and in the lives of others, as the qualities of the inner man are of eternal value.

### **Difficult to walk the straight and narrow path**

Although we recognise that the kingdom of God will endure, we may still find it difficult to concentrate on God's kingdom and not be choked by the things in this world or be entangled in the affairs of this life. Many believers stumble over this area. As a result, their lives suffer and they fail to bear good fruit.

Let us turn to the words of the Lord Jesus in Mark 4 on the parable of the four soils.

#### **Mark 4:18-19**

18 "And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word,  
19 but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

There will be those who hear the precious word of the Lord and do not bear fruit because of the worries or the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. Many in this world long to be rich. They are engrossed with pursuing wealth. The riches of this world are attractive, but they are deceitful and can distract and entangle us. The desire for other things can come in and choke the word and make us unfruitful. They can destroy our lives.

In a parallel verse in Luke 8:14, the Lord Jesus talks about the seed which falls among thorns. He explains that this refers to those who are choked by the worries and riches and pleasures of this life.

Paul, in teaching Timothy to be an effective Christian and a good soldier of Christ, also warns him not to become entangled in the affairs of everyday life.

#### **2 Timothy 2:4**

No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

Paul tells Timothy to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus and to pass on all that he has learnt and heard from him to other faithful men who will be able to teach others (vs. 1-2). Paul goes on to encourage Timothy to "suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (v. 3). Paul then emphasises to Timothy that a good soldier of Christ will not entangle himself in the affairs of everyday life so that he may please the one who has enlisted him (v. 4).

The message of Paul is that to be good soldiers of Christ, we must stay focused on doing the will of God, thereby pleasing Him who has called us.

*Preoccupation with the world can hinder a man from entering God's kingdom*

God had sent His only begotten Son into this world to die for our sins. He now invites us to come into His kingdom. Yet, many people do not respond to God's call and enter His kingdom. Why is this so? Let us look at what the Lord Jesus teaches in the parable of the invited guests.

**Luke 14:15-21**

15 When one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this, he said to Him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

16 But He said to him, "A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many;

17 and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.'

18 "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.'

19 "Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.'

20 "Another one said, 'I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.'

21 "And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'

In the parable, the Lord Jesus tells us that those invited to the feast made excuses not to attend. The host became angry and pronounced: "For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner" (v. 24).

Through the parable, the Lord Jesus is telling us about God's invitation to His kingdom. What a privilege it is to be able to eat bread in God's kingdom! Yet, why are many excluded from taking part in the feast? Did God exclude them? No. The Lord Jesus says they gave excuses not to attend. They were preoccupied with the affairs of this life. They bought land and oxen, and they got married. These things are not wrong in themselves. However, these people have become so preoccupied with these things that they could not properly respond to God's call. Their concern for the legitimate affairs of this life is hindering them from having a part in God's kingdom.

*Believers may be hindered from having a life of true riches and abundance*

Though the parable is directed at those not yet in God's kingdom, the principle also applies to believers. We too may be engrossed with the affairs of this life. We too may fail to pay heed to what the Lord is saying to us and fail to enter into or

maintain a life of true riches and abundance and instead live a life of spiritual poverty.

### **Why do believers become immersed in the affairs of this life?**

Though we recognise we should focus on God's kingdom, yet many of us become immersed in the affairs of this life? Why? There may be several reasons.

#### *1. Personal interest in different aspects of life*

a. Hobbies, for example, interest in sports and games, watching television programmes and reading newspapers and magazines. We may spend much time on these hobbies out of personal interest and become preoccupied with them. We may also be gripped by fleshly indulgence in the pleasures of this life.

b. Studies. Studies can be helpful, but it can also become a problem. Students can become engrossed with their studies in a way that is detrimental to their spiritual life.

c. Work. Work is legitimate, but we can be so interested in our work that we become absorbed in it and our spiritual health suffers. Of course, it does not mean that we should look for work that is uninteresting. There is nothing wrong in enjoying our work, but we have to guard against it becoming a distraction.

d. Family life. It is paradoxical that such an important area of life can become so problematic. In the parable of the invited guests, the Lord Jesus deliberately mentions this area. One of those who offered excuses said: "I have married a wife". This speaks of family relationships. Some find married life so enjoyable they expend an inordinate amount of time and energy on their spouses and children, thereby neglecting other important areas the Lord wants them to pay attention to.

The issue then is for us to learn how to approach the different aspects of life in a healthy and balanced way such that we could keep our focus on the things of God's kingdom.

#### *2. Our sense of responsibility and expectations of others*

a. Studies. Some believers study hard, not because they find studies interesting, but out of a sense of responsibility drilled into them, or because of the expectations and demands of parents, teachers and friends. Christian parents who exert pressure on their children to perform well academically may be doing them a disservice. It can hinder their children's spiritual life. Some believers study hard because they are afraid of what others may think of them should they not do well in their studies. This can happen to those who are at the bottom of the class. But it can also happen to those who excel in their studies because they are afraid of slipping one or two places in their academic ranking. So they become absorbed in their studies, out of proportion to what ought to be.

b. Work. Some believers are not concerned about promotion and career advancement, yet they can find work overwhelming because of the demands and expectations of their superiors. Because they are conscientious, they are given tons of work with tight deadlines. And their sense of responsibility does not permit them to hand in work that is merely acceptable. They find themselves engrossed with work. They know the Lord Jesus calls them to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33), but they struggle to live out this principle in their lives.

c. Family. Believers should take their family responsibilities seriously. But it is possible to take it so seriously as to have it become detrimental to our spiritual life. Think of the mother who has to look after her baby, the needs of the family and other household responsibilities. On top of that, she wants to relate with the in-laws, spend time with the Lord, fellowship with the brethren and participate in church life. There are demands and expectations from different quarters. If not watchful, the pressures for us to meet these legitimate responsibilities can cause us to become entangled, distracted and choked.

### *3. The desire to store up treasures on earth*

The Lord Jesus warns His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount:

**Matthew 6:19**

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

People like to store up treasures on earth. But the Lord Jesus teaches that treasures on earth are not true treasures. They do not last, and will all be destroyed. The Lord Jesus also teaches us to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven, which include the quality of our character and our spiritual well-being. These are what we should be developing, for they are true riches and they will endure. We should also be concerned for others and look to the Lord for wisdom on how to contribute to their lives in these areas.

### *4. The desire for a sense of achievement, recognition, position and fame*

The desire for a sense of achievement and recognition can be very strong. Even those who are regarded as achievers and successful people can still have this desire. But worldly achievements are of a temporal nature; they are not true achievements in God's eyes. Those who focus on worldly achievements would not be focusing on what is truly important – the kingdom of God and His righteousness. They would not be bearing fruit that is truly good. If we strive for worldly achievements, our walk with God will suffer, and we will not be able to have a positive impact on others in any significant measure.

The Lord Jesus tells us that the kingdom of God ought to be like a pearl of great value to us. We must be prepared to forego everything in order to lay hold of the

things of God's kingdom. The kingdom of God is truly precious. Let us remain alert and maintain our priorities and not allow ourselves to be lured away into pursuing the wrong things.

### **Be ready for the Second Coming**

Believers living in the last days need to be especially watchful. Let us pay heed to the words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 17:24-33 about His Second Coming.

#### **Luke 17:24-33**

24 "For just like the lightning, when it flashes out of one part of the sky, shines to the other part of the sky, so will the Son of Man be in His day.

25 But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

26 "And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man:

27 they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

28 "It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building;

29 but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.

30 "It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.

31 "On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back.

32 "Remember Lot's wife.

33 "Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

In these verses, the Lord describes men's preoccupation with the affairs of this life in the days of Noah and Lot. People were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting and building. In those days, people were so taken up with these activities that they were caught unawares when destruction came. Today, many are also very much taken up with the activities of this world.

In verse 32, the Lord warns: "Remember Lot's wife". What happened to her? She looked back.

As God's children, we have committed our lives to Him and to His kingdom. But have we looked back? Have we gone back into the world? Have we become preoccupied with the world, its ways and its values?

We have legitimate responsibilities in this world. There is a place for eating and drinking and being clothed. But the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 6:25: "Do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" And then He says in verse 33: "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you". Yes, we have legitimate responsibilities in this life, but our concentration must be on God's kingdom.

The problem with the people of the world and even with many believers is that they have the wrong perspective of life, the wrong priorities and the wrong concentration. They are absorbed in the affairs of this life and they disregard God's invitation to come to Him. Let us guard against these things and be ready for the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus.

Let us pay heed to the words of the Lord Jesus in Luke 21.

**Luke 21:27, 34-36**

27 "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

34 "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap;

35 for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth.

36 "But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

The Lord warns us to "be on guard" so that our hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation. The word translated "dissipation" here has the sense of drunkenness, nausea and the distressing after-effects of intoxication. However, in this passage, dissipation does not refer to literal intoxication and its after-effects, but more the sense of unsteadiness and the blurriness of mind such that we no longer see things properly and accurately. Like a drunk, we are not able to focus on the right priorities and we become weighted down.

The Lord further warns that the worries and cares of this life can weigh us down such that the day of the Lord comes on us suddenly like a trap, catching us in a state of unpreparedness.

We must "keep on the alert at all times, praying...". Let us not think that what the Lord warns about cannot happen to us. We are surrounded by many pulls, pressures and expectations. We too can be easily entangled and choked by the affairs of this life. We must be alert and prayerful so that finally we may be able to face the Lord properly and that He may tell us, "Well done, good and faithful servant."



## **Two categories of believers negatively affected**

Believers can be negatively affected in a significant way by their preoccupation with the affairs of this life. I will highlight two contrasting categories:

a. The pleasure-loving, self-centred, covetous, irresponsible and lazy believers. They are pleasure-loving and they are absorbed with the pleasures of this life. They are self-centred and they pursue their own ambitions. They are covetous and they spend much time in pursuit of their career and the acquisition of material wealth. They are irresponsible and lazy, and they take the easy way out and are not diligent in the things of God's kingdom. Very easily, these people can be led astray by the evil one and become choked by the affairs of this life and the pleasures of this world.

b. The conscientious, responsible, diligent and caring believers. They may be students, employees, parents, ordinary citizens. Or they may be people highly-respected by society, who are involved in charity, who receive certificates of commendation, medals and awards for their contributions. They can be so absorbed in their earthly responsibilities and in caring for the needs of others that they end up neglecting the spiritual dimension and their own spiritual development, and thus they become spiritually drained. They may have been very conscientious, responsible and helpful in the eyes of men, but from the perspective of God's kingdom, they may bear little true fruit in what really matters – in the area of positive spiritual impact and moral and spiritual well-being – in their own lives and in the lives of others.

## **Concluding remarks**

As we consider all these issues about the pulls and expectations, demands and pressures, we need to be mindful that the evil one is actively at work. He is engineering situations to draw us away from a life of true devotion to God, whether when we are at work, in school, in the home or during our leisure time.

It is not easy to have a wholesome perspective and a wholesome approach to life, but it is very important that we see these issues clearly and then prayerfully look to the Lord to adopt a wholesome approach. We will reflect further on these issues in the third message on this subject.

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