

Simplicity (Part 1): *Freedom From Anxiety*

In his manifesto on the poor, Jesus declared his intention to “set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18). And as he went among people teaching and healing, he observed the many oppressions that bore down upon them. He sought to lift their burdens, and as he did he spoke repeatedly and vigorously of one of the greatest burdens they bore—the burden of providing for themselves against tomorrow. He saw how people were broken by the effort to attain riches. He perceived their awful vulnerability in believing that it was their responsibility to provide for themselves, to watch out for number one. The Apostle Paul said that those who desire wealth have “pierced their hearts with many pangs” (1 Tim. 6:9–10). And Jesus observed the pangs that had pierced the hearts of so many, the pangs of striving for riches. Jesus also saw how people were crushed by the failure to obtain riches...By word and deed he sought to lift the burden of the discouraged and disheartened.

Jesus further saw the wearisome burden upon those who had gotten riches and were trying to hold onto them. He knew the cancerous nature of wealth and often warned of its dangers. He spoke of the “deceitfulness of riches” (Matt. 13:22, KJV). Riches are deceitful precisely because they lead us to trust in them, and Jesus saw that trap and the spiritual destructiveness which attends it. This was the burden that bore down upon the rich young ruler. Not only did he have great possessions, but more significantly, the great possessions had him. Of all oppressions, his was the most spiritually debilitating. To all those weighted down by the burden of tomorrow, or some other burden, Jesus extends a gracious invitation: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28–30).

- Richard Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity*

The Secret of the Easy Yoke

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:29-30)

...His commands are not burdensome. (1 John 5:3)

Most Christians I know have wrestled with the simple statements above made by Jesus and His Apostle John.

They wrestle with them not because they are hard to understand, but because they are hard to believe. Many would agree that living the *Christian Life* has sometimes felt anything but *restful, easy, or full of peace*.

Anxiety, guilt, and shame may be more adequate descriptions of what many have felt who have attempted to carry what they believe to be the “yoke” of Christ.

So, what is Jesus and His Disciple referring to?

The Core of Christian Simplicity: Matthew 6:19-34

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body; so then, if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

²⁵ “For this reason I say to you, 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 life not more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the sky, that they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather *crops* into barns, and *yet* your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more important than they? ²⁷ And which of you by worrying can add a single day to his life’s span? ²⁸ And why are you worried about clothing? Notice how the lilies of the field grow; they do not labor nor do they spin *thread for cloth*, ²⁹ yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith! ³¹ Do not worry then, saying, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear for clothing?’ ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you.

³⁴ “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Relinquishing the Right/Burden to Take Care of Yourself

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth... For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things...”

The Deceitfulness of Wealth

Matthew 13:22

“...And the one sown *with seed* among the thorns, this is the one who hears the word, and **the anxiety of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”**

1. Wealth cannot guarantee anything.
2. Wealth will manipulate, dominate, and corrupt our lives and relationships.
3. Wealth hides the fact that we have already been provided for by God.

1 Timothy 6:9-10

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires which **plunge people into ruin and destruction.** For **the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil**, and some by longing for it have **wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**

Trusting God to Provide in Everything

Do not worry then, saying, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear for clothing?'...For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things...and all these things will be provided to you.

Freedom from Anxiety

Philippians 4:19

And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

2 Cor. 9:8

God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that, always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed

Hebrews 13:5

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Psalm 23:1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Ephesians 4:28

One...must labor, producing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with the one who has need.

Jesus is not telling us to refrain from making provision. We miss the point of the teaching if, when the family gathers for supper, we announce, "Now, the Bible says to take no thought for supper, and so we haven't." No, we work, but we work in faith, not in the anxious concern of distrust. On a practical level it is at this point that the nagging problem of "faith versus works" is resolved. We live centered in trust and faith, and all our action and work arises out of that center. It is not fear and anxiety over tomorrow that prompt us to work, but obedience to the divine command. We make provision as it seems right and good (just as the birds do), but what comes to us is not so much the result of our labor as it is the gracious gift of God. We live the carefree life of unconcern for possessions in the midst of our work. When this spirit of trust pervades all of our efforts, we understand the unwisdom of borrowing evil from tomorrow. No longer distracted by concerns for tomorrow, we seek first Christ's kingdom and his righteousness. The focus of our thought, speech, and action is Christ the Center.

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Single-Heartedness (Next Week)

"The eye is the lamp of the body; so then, if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness... seek first His kingdom and His righteousness..."