

MAKING A LIVING OR MAKING A LIFE

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Text: Matt. 6:25-33

If one word describes the attitude of mind for millions of laymen across America it is the word “frustration”. Having been caught up in a flood-tide of opinion which measures success in terms of

the size of ones' paycheck,

the make and model of car one drives, or

the presence of the latest gadget on the parlor shelf, Mr. Average American ultimately comes face to face with the reality that he is on a treadmill of circumstance that offers little, if any, chance of getting off.

Either consciously or unconsciously the average layman has permitted himself to be stampeded into a life of unnatural and dangerous high pressure. Everything he does, and everywhere he goes, must be at high speed. As Peter Marshall points out,

“We try to cover too much ground in too big a hurry. If we miss one panel in a revolving door, we feel like we are behind schedule for the rest of the day.”

Someone, with a far greater wit than mine, has defined a split second as

“that interval of time between the changing of a traffic light from red to green, and the honking of the horn in the car immediately behind you.”

But where are we going in such haste?

I can remember a time, (and I am just eight days into my thirtieth year), when we as a family would spend a whole evening around an open fire playing one game of dominoes.

Nowadays we feel we are wasting our time unless in a single evening we can, in one observer's

words, “go out to dinner, take in a movie, make a couple of phone calls, visit somebody on our way downtown, and maybe stop off to do some shopping at a bargain sale on the way to the show.”

Our lives have become one mad scramble for success. Even the word itself is alluring. It seems to have an hypnotic effect on people.

Of course, there is the other side of the picture. The man, who out of sheer laziness, refuses to do anything to better his station in life. Perhaps you have heard the story of the tramp who came up to a house and asked for a bite to eat. The housewife said she would be glad to feed him if he would cut up some of the wood stacked beside the house. “What wood?” asked the tramp. “Why that stack around the corner of the house,” answered the lady. “I didn't see any wood,” said the tramp. “But I saw you see it,” said the lady. “Well,” answered the tramp, “you may have saw me see it, but you'll never see me saw it.”

The same attitude of mind is exemplified by an incident that happened at the Ford Plant at River Rough. The personnel manager was interviewing a job applicant. “I want you to understand one thing,” he told the man. “We will not tolerate clock-watching around here.” “Oh, don't worry about me,” the workman assured him. “I am an outside man. I am a whistle-listener.”

Well, there are those kinds of people in the world, but fortunately they are a small minority. Our greater problem is the self-made man who worships his Creator. The literally millions of fine, even noble men, who are making good livings put poor lives.

And the underlying frustration that gnaws away at their spirit is due to the fact that they have sought to erect a superstructure of success, prosperity and security through the making of a living, without recognizing the necessity of laying first a solid foundation through the making of a life.

As Dr. Ralph Flewelling points out in his masterful book, *The Things That Matter Most*,

“To make a living is to rise or fall on a single throw of the dice, to measure success in terms of food and raiment; to make a life is to place one's self above the accidents, the good or evil fortunes of the world, and whatever happens, to provide oneself with the undying satisfactions which neither time nor tide of luck can take away.”

And so I'd like to ask our laymen this morning,

“Are you making a living or making a life?”

It's possible to do both, if, you are aware of the opportunities and alert to the pitfalls along the way.

So take my outline as we discuss first of all:

- 1 The Dangerous Pitfalls that stand in the way of making a life.
- 2 The Divine Priority of the things of God in the making of a life.
- 3 The Definite Promise God has given of complete fulfillment of life's highest aims.

Dangerous Pitfalls

The first and most dread item on this “Pit-Parade,” if I may coin a word, is the lack of any real goal in life. In a recent survey, psychologist William Marston asked 3,000 persons, “What are you living for?” He was shocked, he says, to find that 94% were simply enduring the present while they waited for the future.

Waited for something to happen.

Waited for children to grow up and leave home.

Waited for next year.

Waited for another time to take a long dreamed-of trip.

Waited for someone to die.

Waited for tomorrow without ever realizing that

all anyone ever has is today, because yesterday is gone and tomorrow never comes. Only what we do today really matters.

I read recently of an elderly woman who had gambled practically all of her life without winning a cent. Every morning, on her way to work, she would buy a chance on a certain lottery. Every evening she would come home to the same disappointing results. When someone asked her if she had any regrets in having wasted her hard-earned living, she replied, “No, I don't regret it. Because, although I never won, every day it gave me the satisfaction of having something to live for.”

“Something to live for!”

This, in a sentence, is the thing every man must have. But in this muddled maze we call our modern world, we have a staggering number of men who have nothing really significant to live for. No place really important to go. Their lives are characterized by the fact that they have thousands of sign posts, but no destination.

Dr. Louis Evans, Sr. has pointed out that

“In war, a mistake in tactics, a bad carrying-out of a detailed plan, may be forgiven. But no commanding officer is forgiven if he makes a mistake in strategy, the general plan of large-scale action. In this battle of life, you and I may make individual mistakes, but we must not make mistakes in strategy, in the general plan of our days. In football, a man may fumble the ball, even be tackled for a loss, but there is no excuse for a man's not knowing where the goal is.”

And so it is with life. You can go anywhere from where you are right now. The place where you stand leads to everywhere. And your life can be exactly what you want it to be. But—

without a goal,
without a destination,
without a master plan,

your life is doomed to a meaningless treadmill existence of getting up in the morning, to go to

work, to earn some money, to buy some bread, to get some strength, to go to work again.

Are you making a living, or making a life? If you wish to make a life, you must first of all establish a worthy goal.

Second only to the lack of a goal, is the dangerous pitfall of giving your energies to second-rate causes.

A minister friend of mine recently made a call on a wealthy member of his church. As he left the home and climbed back into his car, he shook his fist in rage at the brownstone mansion. Then, out of sheer frustration, he turned to a friend in his car and said, "Do you know what that woman in there is doing? With all her wealth and ability, she is spending her time making rag rugs."

Recently, I held a crusade in a church where the usually ready response to my appeal for personal workers was not in evidence. I had a particularly difficult job in lining up the trustees to serve. Imagine my indignation when one of the trustees' wives inadvertently blurted out the reason. It seems they did not want to give up their monthly evening of canasta.

Now I don't have objection to rag rugs or canasta. I'm not suggesting we start Do Away with Rag Rugs Week. Nor, am I a member of the Anti-Canasta League. But the tragedy of our day is that while we face the greatest crisis in American history, many of our people are committed to the moral equivalent of playing canasta or knitting rag rugs.

Get any pastor aside and ask him what one thing contributes most to whatever sense of frustration he may have, and he will tell you with a sinking heart, it is watching the men of his church labor long hours, travel countless miles, deny themselves the privileges of home and family, and do so with apparent willingness so that one night a week they may wear a purple robe trimmed with ermine and be called "Worshipful Sir." Or, in order that the interests of some luncheon club may be promoted.

Now again, I have no objection to these activities in their proper place. But while I do not object

to second-rate, or even third-rate causes, I do object to first-rate energies, abilities and loyalties being frittered away on them!

Life is more important than popularity contests and drill teams. We hold Nero in contempt because he fiddled while Rome burned. And yet, in a world that is on the verge of a great conflagration, all too often the voice of Christian laymen has been the

“tinkle of a pizzicato rather than the thunder of a trumpet call.”

And why? Because they are giving their lives to second-rate causes.

It was Edwin Markham who pointed out the folly, and yes, the pity of giving our lives to things that don't really matter. He wrote:

“We are blind until we see
That in the human plan
Nothing is worth the making if
It does not make the man.

“Why build these cities glorious
If man unbuilt goes?
In vain we build the world unless
The builder also grows.”

And then may I suggest that no less dangerous is the pitfall of failing to see the importance of little things. If, in our size-conscious world we need to learn one lesson, it is that there is no such thing as a trifle on Earth. Every thought, and word, and act has an eternal influence. They will all come back to us in the same way that a seed returns to the harvest. An old Spanish proverb puts it this way:

Sow a thought and reap an act.
Sow an act and reap a habit.
Sow a habit and reap a character.
Sow a character and reap a destiny.

And thus it is in the making of a life. We are prone to overlook the results that hinge on small things.

The law of gravity was suggested by a falling apple.

Many of Newton's later discoveries were the result of seeing a child blowing soap bubbles.

It was a tiny key dangling from a flying kite which was the clue to Benjamin Franklin's work in the field of electricity.

A boiling tea pot was the inspiration to Sir Isaac Watts in his work with the potential powers of steam.

Speak to your wife and she will tell you it isn't the big house, the expensive furniture, or the closet full of clothes that wins her love. But, in the words of a recent hit tune,

“Little Things Mean A Lot”.

And so it is with our service to Jesus Christ. We simply cannot underestimate the value and importance of little things done in a large way for Jesus' sake.

There is a famous poem about a monk who, in an old convent cell, painted pictures of martyrs and holy saints and the face of Christ with the crown of thorns. Some of his fellow monks called his pictures poor daubs.

One night, feeling the poverty of his work and longing to honor Christ with pictures as beautiful as those of other painters, he decided to cast his apparently inadequate paintings into the fire.

“He raised his eyes within his cell. Oh wonder!

There stood a visitor, thorn-crowned was He.

A sweet voice the silence rent asunder,

‘I scorn no work that's done for love of me.’“

It was Philip Brooks who said,

“It seems as if the heroes have done for the world
about all they can do, and not much more can

happen until the common men awake and take up
their common tasks.”

Our church, like all other churches, sorely needs men who will do small things in a large way for the sake of a great purpose. Men, who will agree in spirit with missionary James Chalmers of New Guinea when he said, “Don't send us men who talk of self-sacrifice.”

Divine Priorities

“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness“, said
Jesus (Matt 6:33).

What does that mean?

It means that you as a Christian layman are alive to the claims of your “other” or true vocation which is the business of being a Christian. And if you're really serious about wanting to make a life as over against simply making a living, you cannot overlook the cornerstone of self-surrender.

It is surprising to me how many people look upon life as though it were made of a series of little compartments:

business life,

social life,

home life,

church life and so on.

Actually, life is a single unit. For that reason, it's impossible for God to direct your business life, for example, if you persist in trying to run the other phases of your life without regard for Him.

Many men fail in the making of a life at this very point. They are afraid of what we might call “The Blank Check”. Somewhere, lurking in the shadows of their mind, is the idea that God wants to take away their fun.

The truth of the matter is that God actually gave His son for the very reason that those who honor Him as Savior and Lord may enjoy an abundant life. And when you give your heart to Christ, you

discover the more you surrender to Him, the more completely abundant your life becomes.

But of course, with every opportunity, there is a consequent obligation.

I read somewhere of a mathematics teacher who was asked to teach a Sunday School class. On the first Sunday, he wrote this formula on the blackboard: $A + O = R$. He asked the class to figure out its meaning by the next class meeting.

The following week, when none of the class had the answer, he filled out the unknown quantities: A (Ability) + O (Opportunity) = R (Responsibility). $A + O = R$.

This expresses the divine priority God and His Kingdom should have upon your life.

It means that as a layman you are aware of the fact that because you are bought with a price, you belong to the buyer.

It means that you are willing to face up to the inadequacies of religion in your wife's name.

I think most of us would be startled if we picked up the evening paper and read in blazing headlines that the longshoremen had elected a woman as their president. The illustration is as ridiculous as it is absurd. The tough job of loading and unloading ships is a job for men, not women.

But what about an equally tough job? The world-wide task of the Church which is to erect the Kingdom of God. Thank God for our women! If it were not for them, the churches of America might well have died a slow and agonizing death. But the call of Christ is to men as well as women. And in very truth, we will never have a great church unless we have a great layman's organization undergirding it. Unless we have an army of men who, when they hear the call of Christ, will *not* answer

“Here I am Lord; send my Sister,”

but rather, out of the fullness of their love for Christ, will answer

“Here am I Lord; send me” (Isa 6:8).

And thus we come to that

Definite Promise

which God has made for complete fulfillment of life's highest aims.

Jesus put it this way: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these *things* shall be added unto you" (Matt 6:33).

We cannot help but be concerned with meeting the needs of our families. Nor is there anything wrong with making an honest effort to move up in our chosen field of endeavor. In fact, I'm convinced the Bible makes it absolutely clear that each Christian should measure up to his or her highest potential.

As a minister, it is my sacred duty to preach the best sermons I can. They may not be good compared with others, but they must be *my* best.

Likewise, as a layman, it is your sacred duty to make as much money as you can and then, in turn, use that which God entrusts to you for His cause on Earth.

I do not know who said it, but I definitely agree with it:

"If you make it your business to take care of God's business, God will make it His business to take care of your business."

In his tremendous book Youth Seeks A Master, Dr. Louis Evans Sr. tells of a visit he made to the Presbyterian mission field in South Korea. While he was there, he was asked by a missionary doctor if he would like to watch a major operation. The physician who extended the invitation was one who had been eminently successful as a surgeon here in America but, in response to the Master's call, had gone to that foreign field of service.

Dr. Evans tells how he entered the operating room along with a number of Korean students who were learning to relieve the sufferings of their people. The pitiless sun was beating down on the metal roof of the mission hospital. During the seven hours that passed, he had to leave on several

occasions and go outside in the fresh air because of the heavy smell of ether.

Finally, as he entered the operating room the last time, he noticed the doctor had completed his operation and was removing his surgical apron as a Korean assistant was sewing up the incision. As they left the room, Dr. Evans turned to him and said, "Doctor, is every day like this?" He only smiled.

I looked at him. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. His eyes were glassy. His lips were almost purple with strain. His hands began to tremble with fatigue. I said to him, "Doctor, how much would you have received for this operation in America?" He replied, "A great deal of money. It was a complicated one." "How much will you receive for this one?" I asked.

Looking at the poor woman who had been wheeled into the operating room with only a copper in her hand, asking in the name of Christ that He give her life, he looked back at me and with tears welling up in those fine eyes he said, with a choke in his voice, "Well Sir, for this I will get nothing but her gratitude and my Master's smile. But that, Sir, is worth more than all the plaudits and money the world can give."

Dr. Evans says, "I went out of the hospital that day having come to the conclusion that we are incredibly foolish to be afraid of Christ's will. We never truly find our lives until first we lose them. To give them away to Christ is to keep them forever."

Jesus said it this way: "Whosoever loseth his life for my sake shall find it again" (Matt 10:39).

What about you, Sir? Are you making a living or are you making a life?

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these *things* shall be added unto you."