

Lambs Among Wolves

By

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Chapter 7

Don't Be a Fool

WE CANNOT say that one of Christ's parables is more important than another, for every one contains lessons which He knew would be needed by His disciples. But we know that the enemy of our souls will do all in his power to lead us to neglect the lesson which would bring us the greatest help. The Lord gave a parable about a rich man, and many of us might say that since we are not in his class, we need not give special study to that parable. However, if we give this lesson careful thought, we shall see how important it is for every individual.

"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." Luke 12:16-21.

Because of His great love and mercy God is frank in speaking to sinful men. Nothing can be concealed from Him. He tells us just what we are so that we may turn from our sins and be saved. We can imagine that the people in the community where this rich man lived esteemed him highly. He may have been educated, cultured, a social and political leader. But however highly he might have been regarded by men, God called him a fool.

We can hardly think of anything that arouses our resentment more than being called a fool, and we avoid any course that would provoke people to call us by that name. Are we as careful to avoid having God regard us as fools?

Let us seek to understand just why God called this man a fool. We cannot believe it was because his ground "brought forth plentifully," for that is often true of the ground of poor men, and we know it is the blessing of God that causes crops to flourish.

The man lacked room to store his crops, so he proposed to build larger barns. Since it was by the blessing of God that he obtained the large harvest, surely the Lord would not condemn him for taking care of all of it.

After this provision was made, he said to his soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years." Just how many years did this man know that he would live to enjoy these fruits? He did not know. He may have been well and strong, in the prime of life, and assumed that he had many years to live. He was very much interested in his soul's enjoyment of the things of this life, but did he have no regard for his soul's eternal welfare? Perhaps he did. I meet few people who say they have no interest in the future life. But he was sure there was plenty of time; why not enjoy life now and prepare for eternity later? He was prosperous. He had reached the goal which appeals so strongly to the world today, which is commonly called "security." But is security for this life more important than security for eternity?

And so, alas, he complacently went to sleep, unprepared to meet God, and he never wakened! That is why God called him a fool. What could any intelligent being in this world do that would constitute him so great a fool as to go to bed and to sleep, unprepared to meet God, while knowing that he might never waken? As I have traveled over the world, my heart has been stirred with sorrow and pity to see how lightly the great masses of people seem to regard eternity. Eternity is a long, long time. How foolish it is to go complacently about our work or play, giving little or no thought to eternal things, and then going to bed at night unprepared to meet God!

Speaking to a large congregation, I said to a fine-looking youth sitting before me, "If I should bring you a legal document declaring that for the sum of \$1000 you would give up all hope of eternal life, would you sign the paper if I gave you the money?" He replied, "No, sir, I would not."

"Well," I said, "suppose we make it \$100,000; would you sign the paper for that much?"

Again he said, "No, sir."

"Suppose we make it \$1,000,000; would you sign it then?"

"No, sir."

"All right," I said, "let us make it \$10,000,000."

Without hesitation he said, "No, sir."

Perhaps the majority of people would reply as that youth did, yet I fear that millions are throwing away *eternity* for a dollar or less. How many there are who know that they commit sins during the day, but who retire at night, unprepared to meet God!

In these prosperous days it may be well to note that the rich man's problem was what to do with his large crops, which were more than his barns would hold. No doubt there were needy people about him, but he thought only of himself. God had blessed him that he might be a blessing to those who were in want, and thus bring spiritual blessing to his own life. But he held on to his riches, thinking only of his own enjoyment. Instead of expressing his love to God and his gratitude for the Lord's wonderful blessings, his appreciation for all these things was manifested in the words to his soul, "Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."

Dangers We All Face

There are many reasons why we should be prepared to meet God at any time. One is presented in the last chapter of the Bible:

"And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Revelation 22:10-12.

We know from the words of Christ in Matthew 24 and from many other prophecies of the Bible that the time of the coming of Christ in glory and the end of this world is drawing near. We also know that before He leaves the sanctuary in heaven, where He has been ministering in behalf of sinners, He will finish the judgment work and make the solemn announcement just quoted, which marks the close of human probation. After that announcement is made, there will be no more salvation for sinners, for he that is holy, will be holy still, and he that is filthy, will be filthy still.

"What we make of ourselves in probationary time, that we must remain to all eternity."—*Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 466.

We may ask, When will probation close? That question no human being can answer. But we do know that the Saviour said: "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth." Luke 21:34, 35.

What unspeakable folly to be so occupied with the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life that we shall be unprepared when probation closes, and thus lose all eternity in that better world!

I have heard many say, "Well, I do not do anything very bad, and I am trying to do right. I think that if I do the best I can, when probation closes, the Lord will take care of me." Would it not be more sensible to believe that God means what He says, that when probation closes and we are filthy, we shall be filthy still; but if we are holy, we shall be holy still? God has placed the standard before us, and through a life of surrender and obedience we can reach the goal.

Another reason why we should be prepared to meet God at any time is the uncertainty of life. Not a soul upon earth knows of a certainty that he will be alive tomorrow; therefore the time to prepare for eternity is *today*. Some are putting it off, thinking that when trouble and adversity come, they will seek the Lord. They are taking a terrible chance.

One evening some years ago I went with a group of fine young people to a place a few miles out in the country for a picnic. The boys gathered some wood and started a fire, for it was rather cool. Then someone suggested exercising before eating the lunch. They gathered in a large circle and played a game in which two persons would chase another around the circle. As I stood watching them, a young girl and a middle-aged lady started to run. After a few steps the lady stopped, laid off her heavy coat, and then started to run again. After a few steps more, she hesitated and quietly sank to the ground. We gathered around her, but she was unconscious. As we did not know what the trouble was, we placed her in the auto, and our leader took her back to the city.

We sat around the campfire and ate our lunch, and I told the young people stories of the mission fields. At nine o'clock the pastor returned and told us that the woman was dead when we placed her in the car. It deeply impressed me with the uncertainty of life. I realized that when she sank down upon the sand, her eternal destiny was fixed, for "what we make of ourselves in probationary time, that we must remain to all eternity." There will be no change in anyone's character while he is in the grave, and there will be no change in the character when Jesus comes. He will "change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body"; "this mortal shall have put on immortality," but our characters will not be changed.

All through the centuries pagan philosophers have argued, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." They saw little or no hope for life beyond the grave; so they said, "Let us enjoy ourselves, and have a good time, for tomorrow we die." They had no goal for the future, no prospect beyond this life.

But the Christian philosophy is altogether different; it always has been. The Christian says, "I am living in this world under the awful tragedy of sin and rebellion against God. But through His love and mercy I am granted this brief life of probation, with the privilege of developing a character, by His divine grace, which will entitle me to spend eternity in a glorious new world which will be purified from the last vestige of sin. My goal is over there. When trials, afflictions, and disappointments come, I can take it patiently and cheerfully, for my loving heavenly Father knows what it will take to develop the character all must have over there."

Another Peril of the Last Days

One of the greatest dangers for God's people today is the tidal wave of paganism that has swept over the world the past 80 years, by which many who really desire to be saved may be unconsciously influenced. The enemy suggests to young people, "Let's have a good time today; we are only young once, and there is nothing essentially wrong in this amusement or pleasure." The dreadful experience of the demoniac of Capernaum, as recorded in Mark 1:23-26, may well be considered by the youth of today. Mrs. E. White has this comment to make:

"The secret cause of the affliction that had made this man a fearful spectacle to his friends and a burden to himself was in his own life. He had been fascinated by the pleasures of sin, and had thought to make his life a grand carnival. He did not dream of becoming a terror to the world and the reproach of his family. He thought his time could be spent in *innocent folly*. But once on the downward path, his feet rapidly descended. Intemperance and frivolity perverted the noble attributes of his nature, and Satan took absolute control of him.

"Remorse came too late. When he would have sacrificed wealth and pleasure to regain his lost manhood, he had become helpless in the grasp of the evil one. He had placed himself on the enemy's ground, and Satan had taken possession of all his faculties. The tempter had allured him with many charming presentations; but when once the wretched man was in his power, the fiend became relentless in his cruelty, and terrible in his angry visitations. So it will be with all who yield to evil; the fascinating pleasure of their early career ends in the darkness of despair or the madness of a ruined soul."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 256.

In view of the fact that probation will close in heaven before long, and also because life in this world is uncertain and may end suddenly and unexpectedly, is it not sensible and actually imperative that we consider just what we should do day by day so as to be prepared at any time to meet God and make sure of eternity in His kingdom? What is more important, more imperative?

If This Were My Last Day

There is only one way by which we can escape the danger of the foolish rich man, and that is to be prepared to meet God at any time. If I should live today just as God wants me to live and should die tonight, I am sure of eternal life. But if I should not die, and should live the same tomorrow and every day, and my life is extended for months or years, I have nothing to regret, for the greatest satisfaction in this world comes from living in harmony with the will of God. Let me suggest seven things which I believe every intelligent Christian would do if he knew this were his last day in this world.

ONE

If I knew this were my last day, I would not go to sleep tonight until I had made everything right with God. We understand from the Bible that a record of our lives is kept in heaven. All our words, our deeds, and our thoughts are recorded there; and in the judgment that record will be the basis upon which our eternal reward or punishment will be decided. When I come to God and humbly and sincerely confess a sin, asking His pardon in the name of Jesus, He forgives me, and that sin is canceled. If I thus repent and confess every sin, I know that if I die tonight, as far as the record is concerned, all is well. But if there are sins unrepented, unconfessed, I have lost all eternity.

TWO

The second thing I would do if I knew this were my last day would be to make everything right with my fellow men. If we have wronged God, we must make that right; but it is just as necessary to make right the wrongs we have done to other human beings. "The wages of sin is death," and the only way we can escape the wages is to repent and confess the sin and by faith claim pardon through the merits of Jesus our Redeemer.

A young lady attending an academy told me her experience. She was regarded as a fine Christian girl. After hearing my sermon on making things right, she went home thinking seriously of its application in her own life. She was afraid to go to bed, for she remembered having cheated in an examination some weeks before. She dreaded to confess such a thing to her teacher, who esteemed her highly, but finally decided there was no other way. She found the teacher and in deep contrition confessed her wrong. The teacher was kind and forgave her, and they prayed together. She went back to her room, but was still afraid to retire. She finally went to the lady in whose house she worked, and confessed that occasionally while working about the house alone, she had taken fruit or nuts from the table, though she realized they did not belong to her. The lady freely forgave her.

The girl then went to her room, and as she bowed in earnest prayer, she was profoundly impressed with the consciousness that Jesus was in the room with her. She told me she never knew such an experience was possible, and she was determined day by day to keep everything right between her and God, and between her and her fellow man.

Many times youth have told me of having yielded to temptation to steal, perhaps something of no great value, or to tell a falsehood, or commit some other act which they knew to be wrong. Happily many of them have made those things right and have gained peace of mind.

THREE

If I knew this were my last day, I would take some time to study God's Word. We all claim that we believe the Bible, though many have not read it through. How can we be sure we believe a Book we have never read? We are told that the Word of God is to the spiritual life what food is to the physical life. If we would not think of starving our physical bodies, but neglect to take spiritual food, is that not evidence that we place a higher value on mere physical existence? We need to realize that it is not enough just to read a little here and there in the Bible or even to read the Bible through; we must study it until our hearts are stirred with a consciousness that it is a personal message from our heavenly Father.

By way of illustration is the following experience, which has been an inspiration to me for many years. A young lady sent word that she would like to have me bring another minister to her home and have prayer for her healing. We found her to be a young woman eighteen years of age, who had undergone eight major surgical operations. Some of the most skillful surgeons in the land had done their best, yet she was still far from well. We were told that when one of them was asked what he thought of the prospect for her recovery, he said, "She will die unless she has another operation, and she will die if she has another operation."

We prayed for her, and God healed her. The next year I visited her occasionally at the college she was attending. I always enjoyed talking with her, for I had never seen anyone to whom Jesus seemed more real than to her. One day she was telling me about how definitely and lovingly God had spoken to her through His Word.

"I was in the hospital awaiting my seventh major operation," she said. "I was so nervous and so full of pain from head to foot that it seemed as though I could not go through the ordeal again. I picked up this little Bible and said, 'Dear Jesus, will You please say something that will help me through this operation today?' I let the Bible fall open, and my eyes fell upon these words:

"Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: for he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee.' Job 5:17-19.

"I said, 'Thank You, Jesus; I know that will take me through,' and it did."

For nearly 40 years since then she has been serving Him earnestly and devotedly. Truly we never face a trial, or a problem, or a crisis in our lives that God has not made provision for. The help we need may be found in His Word. Since I know that this may be my last day, I believe it is wise to search His Word, humbly asking Him to give me the message I need.

FOUR

If I knew this were my last day, I would take time to pray. In order to impress one point in this matter of prayer upon the minds of the people, I have sometimes asked a congregation, "How many of you say your prayers every night before you go to bed?" Usually the large majority raise their hands, and they look at me with amazement when I advise them not to do it again. Of course they expect an explanation.

I believe there is a great difference between "saying your prayers" and praying. As a child my mother taught me a little prayer, and I said it quite faithfully every night, though I know that when tired or sleepy, I gave it little thought. But as I now think back upon my youthful days, I realize that it is an easy matter to "say" a prayer while thinking of something else.

Some years ago I was a member of a party traveling to Tibet. We had left Chungking in western China and had traversed mountain trails for hundreds of miles through bandit-infested country. Often the scenery was beautiful, and the bandits added to the interest by taking an occasional shot at us.

At last we reached the country inhabited by Tibetan tribesmen. I soon noticed strips of paper about two feet long and several inches wide, covered with strange-looking characters, hanging in bunches from the limbs of the trees. I asked a companion what they were for. He explained that the priests wrote prayers on these strips of paper, and the people hung them up where the wind would blow them back and forth. Thus their prayers would be going on all the time while they were busy with other things.

Often we would see Tibetan priests approaching, each one carrying in his hand a round wooden box with a handle. They were continually whirling these boxes as they walked along, and they did not stop even while talking with us. I asked the meaning of this performance and was told that the boxes were called prayer wheels and contained prayers which they kept in motion hours at a time. Probably Christians in our land would not do that, yet I think we are inclined to drift more or less into formality unless we are keenly conscious that we are conversing with a real Person.

Many years ago I was "saying my prayers" one night, when it seemed as though a voice whispered to me, "Would you say what you are saying if you should open your eyes and see the Lord standing right before you?" I was rather startled and tried to think just what I had been saying. But I forgot the lesson, and a few nights later I was saying my prayers again. Then that voice again asked, "Would you say what you are saying if you should open your eyes and see the Lord standing there looking at you?" Instantly I thought, "No, I would not." And then the question came, "What would you say?" I concentrated my thought upon that question earnestly for several minutes, conscious that I was facing a real crisis in my prayer life. It was the introduction to one of the most precious and important experiences of my life. I determined to say nothing until I was sure it was just what I would say if I were face to face with Him.

Then, quietly the voice spoke again, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." I was profoundly moved, for I knew that Jesus was there with me. In deep contrition I talked with Him, and prayer was a new experience to me.

FIVE

The fifth thing I would do if I knew this were my last day, would be to cultivate a love for heavenly things. Colossians 3:1, 2 reads, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

I believe that if we cultivate a love for heavenly things day by day, we shall feel right at home when we reach heaven. But one who is absorbed in shows, dances, hilarious parties, commercialized sports and games, and the amusement of self is certainly not prepared to enjoy and appreciate the pleasures of heaven. There is a principle involved here which many do not seem to understand. They want to be saved, so they try to overcome the desire to do the things they want to do, but are told are wrong. Their whole attitude is reversed when they have learned the true principle stated by a well-known religious teacher: "Temptation has no power over the one whose heart is already thrilled with the love of things divine."

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." 1 John 2:15-17.

SIX

If I knew this were my last day, I would strive to have my conversation pleasing to my Saviour and helpful to others. The Lord gives us definite instruction on this subject: "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Matthew 12:36, 37.

It is natural for some of us to indulge in a continuous round of jesting, joking, and foolish talking. Others indulge in gossip, criticism, and slang expressions. All these things go out of our lives when Jesus becomes real to us; and we then seek by kind, courteous, helpful conversation to exert an elevating, ennobling influence over all with whom we associate.

SEVEN

If I knew this were my last day, I would watch for every opportunity to do some definite service for my Master. Let us think again of the man God called a fool. He was absorbed in his own affairs. He had all that he needed for himself, but apparently he had no interest in those about him who were in need, and whom he could have helped—and God called him a fool. Selfishness never produces real happiness. Unselfish love for God and for our fellow men brings a joy and satisfaction we can get in no other way.

When the Lord comes with His rewards, we want Him to say to us, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." How could He say that to one who has spent his life in serving himself and living to have what the world calls a good time?

Let us make this seven-point program practical by keeping it in our minds and by practicing it every day.

Keep everything right with our God every day.

Keep everything right with our fellow men every day.

Take time daily to study God's Word.

Spend time every day in earnest prayer and contact with the Lord.

Cultivate a love for heavenly things.

Be careful of our conversation.

Improve every opportunity to witness for Jesus in word and deed.

May I ask you a personal question? Have you been living like the foolish man, just thinking about having a good time and enjoying yourself? Have you been doing things you know were not pleasing to God? Have you been careless and neglectful of these essential things? If your life had suddenly been snatched away in an accident, would you have lost all eternity? If so, will you lift your heart in earnest prayer right now: "Oh, God, I am determined by Thy grace to begin this very hour to live for eternity. I cannot, I will not, be a fool and run the risk of losing eternity, the life which Thou hast provided for me at infinite cost."