TOPIC: SPIRITUAL THUGS

We must protect our salvation and eternal life against any "thorns" that would choke them.

KEY POINTS

- Most of us are very concerned about our response to the gospel of Jesus Christ and determining our eternal destiny.
- We share the word of God with others, and even have spontaneous outbursts of praise and worship to God. These are good indicators of our desire to live a faithful Christian life.
- Nevertheless, Luke 8 tells us to be on guard against some subtle and insidious attacks we will face in our Christian walk: The Cares, Riches and Pleasures of Life. Luke 21 also adds Carousing and Drunkenness. We'll call these attackers 'Spiritual Thugs'.
- There are many God-given desires and responsibilities we cannot and should not ignore:
  - Eating well and keeping our bodily 'temple' in good shape;
  - Performing well on our jobs so we can continue to provide for ourselves and our families;
  - Raising and educating godly children;
  - Being significantly involved in the work of God.
- Then there are things we desire and activities we engage in that often consume our time. Though not sinful in and of themselves, they have an insidious way of stealing minutes, hours, days and weeks from us:
  - Shopping for the latest fashions, electronics or gadgets;
  - Keeping in touch with the whole world through social media;
  - Spending time growing our business venture. (It's really good to have some rich and successful Christians in society, isn't it?)

  And on and on it goes….
- Jesus gave two parables to help us think straight and guard against this host of activities (and sometimes even necessary things) that have the potential of becoming Spiritual Thugs in our lives.
- Let's stop for a few minutes and actually consider what our Lord Jesus is saying to us.
- His two main concerns relate to our response to the gospel and our readiness for His second coming.
- There are some who hear the gospel and respond positively in faith. They begin to grow as Christians and blossoms appear on their branches. The blossoms turn into fruit (fruit of the Spirit) and the expectation of a great harvest begins.
- These folks are excited and motivated. They begin to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- However, the parable in Luke tells of a great problem. As the good plants begin to grow, thorns also grow vigorously beside them. The thorns grow stronger and faster than the good plants and eventually choke them to death. It's a slow choking that is usually not even noticed by the victim.
- That is how the cares, riches, pleasures, carousing and drunkenness will choke our spiritual lives if we are not paying attention. They take our focus away from a joyous expectation of the Lord's coming and can cause us to miss it.
- What a devastating thought!
- Instead of appropriate concern and a well-balanced level of care for our health, our family, our children's education, our careers and our relationships, we are now consumed with worry and depression, asking questions and making statements like the following: "What is God doing in my life? He is not responding to my prayers."

KEY SCRIPTURES:

Luke 8:4-8, 11-15; 21:29-36

- We try to change situations and, particularly, people that we have no power to change. The stress of it all has shot our blood pressure sky high. We can't sleep at night.
- Our stress and worry has not caused us to turn to God, but has rather caused us to slowly turn away from Him and His word.
- We're so tired and worn out we find it hard to drag ourselves to the house of God. We have no urgency nor desire to maintain our daily devotions.
- The thugs are choking us.
- We rack up credit card debt we can't pay, make risky investments in businesses we don't even understand and work two or three jobs in order to chase after riches that are never enough.
- We have turned away from faith in God to faith in the almighty dollar. We no longer believe that "my God shall supply all [our] need according to His riches in glory…" (Philippians 4:19).
- How do we counteract these threats? How do we make sure that we do not miss salvation and eternal life because of spiritual thugs?
- Here is one simple question we can answer that will let us know whether or not the thugs are getting the upper hand:
  - Do I have a very clear, defined, uninterrupted time with God every day?
    -A time for worship, reading the Word and talking to God?
    -A time that I prioritize and protect in spite of all the things around me clamouring for my time?
- If we are in the presence of the Lord every day, He will expose the thugs. He will fight with us and for us to give us victory over the thorns that seek to choke our spiritual lives.

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION TOOLS

1. Take a little time to meditate on the following questions before answering:
   a) Do I have a very clear, defined, uninterrupted time with God every day?
      i. If so, when does this time take place? If not, am I willing to carve out the time in my schedule?
   b) What happens during this time (worship, reading the Word of God, talking to God…)?
      i. Revisit some songs of worship, scriptures, or revelations the Lord has put in your heart.
   c) Is this a time that I prioritize and protect?
2. What spiritual thugs have entered your life? What are you willing to do to beat down these miscreants? Why not start the process now by lifting your praises to the Lord.

Prayer Time

Lord, help me to live daily in Your presence. Help me to eradicate the spiritual thugs that have crept into my life.

L.G. ice-Breaker: Think about situations where you or someone else has been bullied. What did you/could you do to effectively deal with bullies?

WEEK OF SUNDAY, AUGUST 6, 2017

NOTES

Meditate as you read through/listen to this week's message. If it helps, use symbols for your notes.

(Reminds me/Confirms) (New idea) (Think about)

! (Do this) (Speaks to my heart) (Must share)

PRAYER NEEDS/THANKSGIVINGS