

Matthew 6:24-34 Part 6
Satan's Only Weapon Against a Believer in Christ Part 6
also II Corinthians 11:22-30 and Philippians 2:19-24

The foundation text for our study is Matthew 6:24-34. But our first text for today is II Corinthians 11:22-30. The theme of this series is - outside of salvation - the most important issue in theme for a believer to understand. That is, once a person is saved (the Spirit of Christ has come to live within) the rest of that person's life is spent growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and through that having their minds renewed. Therefore it is important that every believer understand this word **μέριμνα** (merimna) that Jesus introduced to everyone in Matthew 6:24-34. **μέριμνα** (merimna) means *the occupation of the attention of the mind*. Not to occupy the mind, but to occupy the attention of the mind.

Jesus presented three things in that text in Matthew 6. Number one, that human beings were made (created) with the capacity to only be able to serve one thing. That is it. To only be able to be occupied and have the capacity to be occupied with one thing. Period. Therefore in verse 25 of Matthew chapter 6, Jesus said, **Because of this reason, take no thought for your life.** That is the word **μέριμνα** (merimna). Not even the basic necessities. Do not allow your mind, the attention of your mind, to be caught up with things; even the very necessities of life that you could say, "Well, the necessities of life are important for me to be occupied with, right? We have to exist." Jesus said, "No." Satan will even use the necessities of life to occupy the attention of the mind.

So therefore verse 33 of Matthew chapter 6 Jesus said, **Seek first the kingdom of God and all the other things that you are worried about, all the other things that you need, they will be added.** You do not have to think about and worry about it, they will be taken care of. You take your capacity to only be occupied and serve one thing, take that and seek first the kingdom of God for your life. Period. Do not be occupied with the other things.

That is why we took I Peter 5:5-9, where Peter says that we need to cast all of our *care*, our *anxiety*, our **μέριμνα** (merimna), we need to cast it all upon the Lord because Satan is walking around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. That does not mean destroy. In context he is talking about he [Satan] is looking for Christians who are susceptible to having the occupation of the attention of their mind taken away from Christ, so he can find out what it is. He always approaches a believer by saying, "What is it? What activity, what person, what thing in life can I use to occupy the attention of your mind and take you away from Christ, with your mind? I cannot take you away from Christ in your soul." So Satan cannot take away our salvation, but what he can do is attempt to derail maturity and growth. Because maturity and growth comes with the renewing of the mind. And if our minds are busy, we are not there. We are not there to occupy our attention with the things of Christ.

So in Luke chapter 8 in The Parable of the Sower, we saw in verse 14 that the word of God falls in amongst weeds and thorns that represent the *cares* - and there is our word **μέριμνα** (merimna) - the cares, and the wealth, and the pleasures of life. And what Jesus said was, when the word of God falls in amongst your activity with the things of the world - and I want you to catch this now because with this and the next Scripture text it is saying the same thing but in two

different circumstances. In other words, if I hear the Word of God and then the rest of the week go out into the world and be occupied with the world, Jesus said that will cancel out the effectiveness of the Word. You cannot do both. You can go out in the world, but if you are occupied, if you allow it to consume you, take over your life, the influence of the Word will be nullified.

That is why in Luke chapter 10, when we studied Luke 10:38-42 about Mary and Martha; you remember Martha was in the kitchen cooking food. Jesus was in her living room teaching. Mary her sister was sitting at Jesus' feet and the whole crowd was in there. And she is in the kitchen all upset, and comes stomping in, and stands over Jesus, and says, "Do not You care, are not You concerned that my sister has left me alone to serve?" And apparently Jesus nodded yes, because Martha comes back and says, "Well, then tell her to help me." And He says, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. But Mary has chosen the good meal, the good portion, while you are in there trying to cook the physical food."

Which, if you look at the scene is perfectly justified, because somebody has to cook the meal for all these people. Somebody has to be the hostess, right? And the moral of the teaching was that Jesus was saying, even serving Christ in a justifiable way in the human, even service to Christ, you can be occupied with that rather than hearing the Word. See in one instance in The Parable of the Sower, it is hearing the Word then going out and getting caught up in the cares and the riches and the pleasures of life that cancels out the effectiveness of the Word. You hear one, you go out and do another. In the Mary Martha situation her occupation and serving Christ was happening at the same time the Word was being given. Her choice was to serve. And Jesus said, "No, you are occupied with serving. You need to turn the burners off, come in and sit down, and listen to the Word." So you get the point, right? Occupied with the things of Christ.

Last week we took I Corinthians chapter 7, the chapter on marriage. The Gentiles had questions about marriage for the apostle Paul. How do we handle the marriage situation when somebody received Christ, but they are married to a nonbeliever and they are a believer. What do we do? Are we supposed to divorce them? Are we supposed to go by the Jewish law? How is it that we are supposed to handle this particular situation? And basically what Paul said was whatever circumstance you are in when you receive Christ, serve the Lord in it. Yet if the nonbeliever wants to leave let him leave. In fact, that is a command. If you were saved as a slave, serve the Lord by being a slave. If you are allowed your freedom, take it; but if not serve Christ in it. Whatever situation you are in, serve Christ.

But then I told you the five basic principles of life for the Christian from I Corinthians 7:29-30. The five basic principles of life.

(1) First of all Paul says, **For those of you who have wives be as though you do not have wives.**

(2) Secondly, **Those who are weeping as though not weeping.** It is not wrong to cry. It is not wrong to weep. We know from Ecclesiastes chapter 3 there is a time to cry, and there is a time to laugh, a time to mourn, a time to dance. So if you are grieving and you have to cry, then cry. Just do not get consumed in it.

(3) **That those who rejoice should be as not rejoicing.** Do not get consumed in it.

(4) **That those who purchase things should be as though they do not possess them.** That is one of the biggies. See, because in reality in our culture when you buy something it owns you. You do not own it. You are its servant. Purchase without possessing. We all have to buy things, but buy it as though we do not own it. Buy it as though it does not own us.

(5) And then he says, **Be using the world without overusing it.** We all have to go out in the world. We have to sustain our life. We have to live. We are on this planet. We are on this earth. Go out and use the world for your life and your sustenance. Do not overuse it.

Most of our problems come in that we have taken in too much of the world into our lives. It has overcome us. We have so many possessions that they own us. So you can see what he is saying.

In fact, he summarizes it. In fact, let me read his examples in verses 32 and 33 of I Corinthians chapter 7 because it has to do with our texts for today. Paul says let me give an example, the unmarried man cares about the things of the Lord. The word *care* is the word **μέριμνα** (merimna) in verb form: **μεριμνάω** (merimnao). So, **The unmarried man is occupied with the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but the married man is occupied with how he may please his wife from out of the world.** He says in verse 34 of I Corinthians 7 that the woman or the virgin who is not married she cares, **she is occupied with the things of the Lord how she may serve Him in body, soul, and spirit; But the married woman is occupied** (she cares) **about how she may please her husband from out of the world.** Now in each of those instances he used our word, *occupied*. He did not say, "It is wrong for you to be married and be occupied." He is saying, "It is natural, expect it."

The more people you take into your life, the more you are going to be occupied with things other than Christ. If you have ten children, you can imagine how many people out of that, ten plus you - husband and wife - is twelve people; how many people will be clamoring to go out into the world for their pleasures and satisfaction. And you have to try to follow the Lord and you have all these people saying, "No, no, no, I want to do this! I want to do this! I want to go here. I want to go there." Remember you only have the capacity to be occupied with one thing. So that is why he began by saying, "Those who have wives as though they have not." In other words, your devotion to the Lord should not change just because you married, you still should be devoted to Christ.

But I point your attention out, that in I Corinthians 7:32 and 34 that the word *care* (**μέριμνα**, merimna) is presented as somebody who is occupied with the things of the Lord. Up until now, it has been presented as prohibitive - do not get occupied with the things of the world. Do not, do not, do not. If you get occupied with the things of the world, you will not be occupied with Christ. Now we are introduced with the principle that there is a positive progressive side to this; not only are you not to be occupied with other things, but you are to be occupied with Christ. The less you have in the world that demands your time and attention, the

less you have the more you can be occupied with the things of the Lord, because you only have the capacity to be occupied with one, not several.

And he says in verse 35 of I Corinthians 7, **I am saying all this to you for your benefit not to put a noose around your neck.** I am not trying to ruin your party, I am just trying to accomplish two things; (1) **that you might know how to conduct yourself properly in this earthly life and** (2) **that your devotion to the Lord would be without distraction.** That is what it is all about. And what Satan does is he comes along and says, "How can I take you away from the word of God? How can I take you away from being focused on and following Jesus Christ's will for your life? How can I keep you, detour you, distract you from following Christ today?" Too many things going on. Too many places to go. Too many things to do. What do they have to do with anything?

So today, I want to emphasize this point to you. We have two pieces of Scripture, very quickly II Corinthians 11:22-30. This is entitled The Portrayal of Boasting. It comes from our Mastering the Bible series that we took on Thursday nights. This is the section where Paul said he was forced to boast about his accomplishments in Christ. Can you imagine that? He is going to present himself as being out of his mind by doing this. He says, "I am speaking deliriously."

The false teachers had come into Corinth. Now this is very important for many reasons, not just for our word study. Paul says, "False teachers have come into Corinth. Compare them to me." The Portrayal of Boasting. Paul is now going to boast about his accomplishments in Christ to show that he is original, and these other false teachers are false. But I am warning you now, his boasting is all the difficult, hard things he had to suffer, not accomplishments like, "I preached to five thousand last night. I had a church of ten thousand once." It had nothing to do with that.

He starts out, verse 22, **Are they Hebrews? Also am I. Are they Israelites? Also am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? Also am I. Are they ministers of Christ?** Do they present themselves as ministers of Christ? Listen to this, **I speak being delirious I am beyond them.** If I stood up in front of church on Sunday morning and made a statement like that you would say, "Pastor Bill has totally flipped."

"All those pastors in town, are they ministers of Christ? I am beyond them."

You would say, "Whoa, whoa, dude. Sisquoc has gone to your head. No wonder you are out in Sisquoc."

But listen to this, **In labors, more abundantly**, it means *to labor to the point of exhaustion*. **In stripes** - that is, he was beaten - **immeasurably**, could not count them all. **In prisons, more abundantly than them; in situations of deaths, often. By the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.**

It was against the law to beat someone - according to Jewish penalty, punishable by death, if you were to beat someone forty times and you miscount and beat them forty-one. Then

it is on you. So they would whip them forty times minus one, they would go thirty-nine, just in case they are counting wrong, then they would get it right on forty.

By the Jews five times, five times I received this whipping. That is for being a Christian. **Three times I was beaten with a rod; once I was stoned.** He is not talking about drugs. Literally taken out of the city and pelted with stones and left for dead. **Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have passed in the deep.** Floating around out in the water. And then also, in travels; you had to travel a lot to serve Christ. They did not have airplanes in those days, you walked or took a ship. **In dangers of rivers, in dangers of robbers, in dangers from my race** (that is the Jewish people), **in dangers from the Gentiles** (anybody who is not Jewish), **in dangers while being in the city, in dangers while being in the desert, in dangers in the sea, in dangers among false brothers, in labor and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst** (being deprived of food and drink), **in fastings often, in cold and nakedness**, that is not being totally naked but not having sufficient clothing in the cold.

So, do you see what he is doing? He says, "I am more of a servant than they are. Look at what all I have had to go through." And the successful ones - they would come into town, they would literally tell the people this prosperity gospel and the people gave them their money and made them rich, and they said, "See, success. Look people, the apostle Paul? When he was here in town he had to get a job did not he? Look at us. Wealthy and healthy!" And the people bought into it, literally. And Paul said, that is why in II Corinthians Paul said, "When I was in town I did not want to offend anybody by taking financial support, so I went and got a job, so that you would come and hear the gospel and it would not offend you if you had to give." But he says now, "Forgive me for that wrong, because now these guys come into town, you give them all your money. I should not have taken it easy on you. I should have made you live up to your responsibility if you are going to give it away to false teachers."

And then now, The Description of that thing from inside. This is all the outside things he had to suffer. Look at verse 28, **Apart from the things outside** - in other words, everything that he has just listed - **Apart from this, I have the pressure upon me, and according to each day.** I gave it to you literally. The English text says *daily*, but in the Greek text it is *according to each day*: one at a time, every single day, day after day. **The pressure upon me, the care of all the assemblies.** Our word *care* is the word **μέριμνα** (merimna). Positively occupied with not only Christ, but the assemblies of believers. And all the false doctrine going on, all the people, all the problems that are going on. Not only the external things I have to go through but the internal things I have to go through, I am constantly, I have the pressure on me; these things come on me, the constant care of all the assemblies, all of them.

He says, **Who is weak, and I am not weak?** So he is admitting it. They say, "Well Paul is just weak." He says, "Yeah, I am weak." **Who is offended, and I myself am not being burned?** Have you ever heard that term before? "Yeah, I used to go to church before and I got burned, I just did not go back." Biblically, it is people in the congregation get offended, it is the pastors that get burned. So, **Who is offended? Who is being offended and I am not being burned?** Are you kidding me? I am not the success story. I suffer along just like everybody else does. I am weak like everybody else is. I suffer like every one.

Now, listen to verse 30, **If to boast is necessary, (if I have to do this) I will boast of the things of my weakness.** Wow. There is no positive thinking there. I will share with you out of my weaknesses and all the things I have to suffer for serving Christ. There is no human success story. It is sacrifice and suffering, that is what it is. Whether it be a Christian, or whether it be somebody like the apostle Paul who is serving Christ, it is to the extent that we are willing to sacrifice and suffer. Not only for the sake of Christ but for other people.

Very quickly, the next text, Philippians 2:19-24. You get the idea that it is not just prohibitive, it is not just make sure you are not occupied with anything else other than the things of Christ, but rather in the positive direction, we are to be occupied with the things of Christ. In Philippians 2:19-24, The Proof of Character in Fellowship.

Paul says, **Now I hope** - he is speaking to the Christians in Philippi. **Now I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, in order that also I myself may be of comfort, after I have known the things concerning you.** So I am sending Timothy, we are all concerned about you. We hear there are some problems. We do not know what is going on. There are no telephones. There is no communication system. So I am sending Timothy. He is going to find out what is going on and when he brings me word then it is going to bring good comfort to me. You can understand Paul's occupied with the things of the assemblies. He is concerned about people's spiritual welfare. That is what he is involved in, occupied with.

Listen to verse 20. This explains why he is sending Timothy. And listen to the literal translation. **For I have not even one person who is like-minded.** None, other than Timothy, emphasized in the Greek. It is not just *I have no one, I have not even one person who is like-minded.* **Who genuinely will care for the things concerning you.** The word *care* is our word **μέριμνα** (merimna). He is the only one that I have that is just like me, that is concerned about your spiritual welfare. He is the only person I have out of all the people that we have here, who will genuinely, sincerely, care about your spiritual things.

And here is the reason why, verse 21, **For all are seeking the things of themselves, and not the things of Christ Jesus.** All. Everybody. In fact, in the Greek text it is the definite article: *For the all people.* Other than Timothy everybody is seeking their own things and not the things of Christ Jesus. That is why I can only send Timothy. He is the only one that cares. But, verse 22, **But you know the proof of him.** You know his proven character. **That as a son to a father, he served with me for the gospel. This one hand (meaning Timothy) on the one hand therefore, I hope to send immediately, whenever I should see the things concerning me. But on the other hand, I have been persuaded in the Lord that also I myself will come to you soon.**

Where the word **μέριμνα** (merimna) is used in a positive way, we are to be occupied with the things of Christ. We are to be seeking the things of Christ. Because if we are not then we are occupied with something else. Period. Maybe what we should do for one another in our encouragements, when we call one another and talk to each other, or get emails, or text one another, and people are talking about their activities and what they are going to do, maybe we should encourage one another by saying, "Are you seeking the things of Christ or are you seeking the things of yourself?" If you are not occupied with Christ, it has to be something else.

I am not talking about psychology and concentrating, "I have to concentrate on Jesus Christ. Do not talk to me! I am concentrating on Jesus Christ." To occupy the attention of the mind involves relating with people, and circumstances, and the things of life, but is it because of me following Jesus Christ?

I Corinthians 7 tells us there will be a natural distraction just being involved in this earthly life. But the point is, are we on the path to be occupied with and seeking the things of Christ for our life, and being cognizant of this and making sure that we get back on track? Making sure we are following the Lord because we can be distracted so easy, be going in a different direction. What are you searching for? What are you looking for? "Well, I am thinking of doing..." Why? Are you seeking the things of Christ or the things of yourself? Remember that Satan is a roaring lion. He is looking around for the things, or the people, or the circumstances that will take people away from the Word of God, away from the things of Christ, away from the Lord's will for their life for them to be changed and transformed. We have to be aware that. Paul says we are not ignorant of Satan's devices. We have to understand what is going on.

I think one of my favorite phrases is to hear someone tell me, "Yeah, I have been kind of going along struggling and then I realized what was going on." They saw the whole picture. They saw what was happening to them. Enlightenment, you know, epiphany. Ooh, yeah, I see what is going on. Okay, I get it. I get it. Satan is trying to derail me.

Next week, we finish out this series on what to do when we are occupied with things other than Christ. Paul actually tells us in Philippians chapter 4 what we are to do about it. In fact, he states there that we are not to be occupied with one thing. Zero. None. Other than Christ. So he tells us what to do. So next week in Philippians chapter 4.

I hope you can sense the importance of this teaching and this issue within the body of Christ in the early church. Jesus laid the foundation, and then Peter and Paul and all of them took off with it because it is the major issue for every believer. The major issue for every believer is Satan is scouting us. He knows what the things are that will take us away from Christ.

Let's close with prayer.