



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

This is Your Life
Part 1

Matthew 6.25–34

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MATTHEW 6.25-34

1

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

INTRODUCTION TO THEME

I’m sure this picture on the screen brings back some memories for many of you. *This is Your Life* was a popular radio, then TV show in the late 40s and on all the way up to the 1980s. It was one of the very first reality TV shows. It worked like this: an unsuspecting guest would be selected—sometimes entertainment personalities and other times ordinary people who had contributed to their communities in some significant way. The show would do all of the background research on the person and then tell the story of their life both in narrative form and by bringing on stage pivotal people from their past and their present.

Interestingly, the show originated when creator Ralph Edwards did a story of a despondent paraplegic soldier injured in WWII, to relive his happier past and point to the hope for a brighter future. The idea stuck and the rest is history.

2 The show's concept is brilliant in that it gives perspective on a person's life. It highlights the good times and accomplishments, while never shying away from the difficult moments, even naming how those hard times in life were instrumental to their life, and even sometimes directly connected to their successes. In bringing back key figures from a person's life, it becomes evident that no person becomes great by their own sheer will, force of personality, or good luck alone.

I'll let you in on a little secret: Helping individuals and the congregation see life from this perspective is one of our goals as pastors and one of the narrative subtexts in the Bible. Life is full of ups and downs. Bad things happen. Circumstances change. Joy enters from out of the blue. People disappoint us. We disappoint people. Redemption is found. And in all of this God is present, community grounds us, and **our response** in these good and bad times makes a difference.

For the next five weeks we are going to invite you to take a look at your life. To examine what really matters. To test ourselves to see if we are headed in the direction that we should be heading.

Each Sunday, just like in the old *This is Your Life* shows, we are going to take a Biblical figure and do a retrospective on their life to see what we can learn from it. Next week Pastor Pam is going to look at Rahab, whose name literally means "prostitute." But would you believe she was a hero spy for Israel, appears in the Genealogy of Jesus, and is known as a saint for her faith? I wonder what we might learn from her life? That we are more than our jobs? That courage matters? The following week we will celebrate Remembrance Sunday, a time of honoring those in our congregation who have died in the past year—what do their lives teach us? In the weeks that follow we'll also look at the life of Paul the Apostle who went from being a persecutor of Christians and an accomplice to the murder of Stephen, the first martyr in Christianity. Does Paul teach us that we are more than your worst mistake?

THIS IS. YOUR. LIFE.

But today, to start the series, I want to ask this question: **What if we lived our lives as though we knew we were going to appear on an episode of *This is Your Life*?** Would we think about things differently? Would we make different decisions about how we spend our time, or money? Would we volunteer at the Winter Shelter or Food Bank? Give more money? Visit a shut-in? Would we treat people differently? Would we take more risks, different risks or fewer risks? What would we do differently in our relationships? Would we set more goals? Would we seek help to slay that dragon of codependence, or addiction, or hate that may rule our lives? Would we be more loving, more patient, more gentle, more grateful? Have more fun? Would we invite God into our lives more often? **This is your life. What are you going to do with it?**

As a people, our religious forerunners have looked to the Bible for guidance on what to do with our lives. In many ways the early Brethren were just as savvy as we think we are. They knew that in a book of wisdom that dates back thousands of years and covers countless religious, political, social eras, you can find scriptural reference for almost anything. So what they decided was that the New Testament would be their primary source. And that even within that, the Gospel of Matthew tended to be a favorite, maybe because it holds the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus gives a lot of good instruction for how to live your life. This is where our scripture for today comes in. Usually we read this particular section of scripture at face value; a text on the futility of worry. But let's look a little closer as we look at both the Sermon on the Mount and the title This is your Life.

The more I thought about this title, the more I realized there are a few lessons in the title alone.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE. THIS IS.

Meaning right here, right now. The show is not called *This was your life*, or *This will be your life*. It was called **THIS IS Your life**. Or as Jesus might say...*do not worry about tomorrow*,

4 *for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.* Good living is living in the present. God is a God of history, but also of the now. Our lives are not something we start living tomorrow. And our lives are not totally determined by what has happened in the past. Sure, our past experiences matter, and it's good to have goals for the future. But neither the past nor the future are as important as the present. What we do now is what matters most. I always thought it was a little cheesy when people would say "**Today** is the first day of the rest of your life." But now I think I get it. **THIS IS your life. Now.**

THIS IS YOUR LIFE. YOUR.

It is your life to live. It is not anyone else's and no one can live it for you. This may sound too individually focused. Rereading the Sermon on the Mount, I was flabbergasted, and I don't use that word lightly, at the number of times Jesus says the words "you" and "your." God has arranged the world in such a way that we have free will. Because of that, we are responsible to make choices that determine how our lives and our communities will be faithful and flourish. Or not. The buck stops with each one of us, so to speak. And sure, circumstances may sometimes be against us. When things get difficult it is up to each one of us to decide how we will respond. God is with us all the way, but these lives are ours to live, hopefully in Jesus' way. And speaking of Jesus' way, even though the lives are ours, we also have a choice whether we will live them for ourselves alone, or share them in abundance.

THIS IS YOUR LIFE.

Life. What a gift. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus gives instructions for how we can live a life that is really life. "Is life not more than food, and the body more than clothing?" He goes on. True living is not the pretentious piety of public prayer. True life is not in possessions or money. Judging others gets us nowhere. Defeat your lust. Be good to your word. Forgive. Do not let anger consume you; make amends with your sisters and brothers. Love your enemies. Don't be naïve to the ways of humanity, but trust fully in God. Build your life

on strong foundations. This is how we value the gift of life. These are instructions for living life abundantly.

RECENT DAYS TESTING RESOLVE

These have been somewhat tense times in our denomination and district. And this congregation has spoken lovingly and clearly that we are committed to provide ministry to all, and will support the pastoral team to provide that ministry.

Sadly, this position has led to some ugly behavior from others. Unkind things were said about us as a congregation. I was singled out for some particularly harsh words and name-calling.

I don't want to make a bigger deal out of it than it was—it pales in comparison to some of the real problems in life. But it did remind me that it is times like these when our true commitments are tested and refined. Many times, in this process people would approach me and say “This must be really hard for you right now” or “I am so sorry this is happening”. And there were moments when it was emotionally difficult. But never once did I—or we the pastoral team—think about wavering. And quite frankly, I was energized. A lot because of the support of you all, but even more so because we were asking ourselves *This is Your Life* questions that put things in perspective.

THIS IS—Am I making a faithful decision right now, in this moment? Not concerned or intimidated by threats or fearful of what **could** happen.

YOUR—God has given us the power to make choices. **Grounded in God, am I taking what control I have to act in the situation?**

LIFE—Does this position and my action reflect Jesus' way of abundant living?

The answer to these questions was Yes, yes, and yes! Now, this was just one moment in time. Things are settling back down related to this matter. But the questions can be applied again and again.

6 God has given us these lives. And so I must ask:
Followers of Jesus...this is your life—this is our life—
What will we do with it?

This present moment is such an and exciting moment in our congregations life and I am hopeful because of the way we've been answering these questions....

