

# The Last Straw

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

A. Psalm 39

B. He was using a rickety wagon, moving goods for others for many years, and he was quite good at it. A large family needed to be moved across town, so he piled their worldly possessions high on his wagon. The last load made quite a heap, but the wagon appeared to be holding up under all of that weight. All that remained was an empty hat box. He casually tossed it on the wagon, pleased that he would not have to take another load the next day. As the hat box landed on the load, a loud groan came from the wagon, followed by a very loud crack, and then with a shudder, the wagon collapsed in the yard. It took the man three days to unload, repair, and re-load the wagon, and carry the last of the furniture across town in two sensibly sized loads. However, he wisely left the hat box behind to be carried by someone else. After all, it was the hat box that broke his wagon.

C. People have a tendency to focus on the last straw, the final matter that preceded a disaster.

1. They do not reason that other factors had a larger contribution.
2. The last straw may be a very minor matter, but it is the one that gets all of the attention and blame.
3. A man leaves for work in the morning and forgets the paperwork he stayed up to complete the night before, he is late getting to work because of an accident on the highway, he learns that a contract he worked very hard to arrange has been cancelled, on the way home from work he is frustrated and driving too fast and is cited for speeding, he pulls into the driveway and runs over his son's bike that was left there and punctures the car tire, he goes into the house and his wife greets him and asks him to take out the trash before supper, and he blows up at her. She wasn't asking for too much nor was her manner unkind; it was the hatbox on the wagon, the end of his rope, it was the last straw.

4. "There comes a point where you no longer care whether there is a light at the end of the tunnel or not. You're just sick of being in the tunnel."  
(Ranata Suzuki)

5. Origin: "The last straw which breaks the camel's back" has an Old Testament sound, but it is a chimney corner scripture. It isn't written in the Bible. The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations lists it as a mid 17th century proverb, with earliest written citation from The Edinburgh Advertiser, May 1816 in protest of the increasing taxes on soap: "Mr. Brougham remarked, that if a tax on soap was only 3 pence a head, or 4 and 5 upon the lower classes, yet straw upon straw was laid till the last straw broke the camel's back."

D. Answer: "The last straw breaks the camel's back" is not true.

1. The camel's back is broken by the combined weight of all of the straws, foolishly placed there by poor judgment.
2. The problem with beginning with poor judgment is that one simply cannot determine where to end.

## **I. THE WRONG PROBLEM**

- A. A man asked Jesus to make his brother divide the inheritance with him
  - 1. Luke 12:13-15
  - 2. Jesus was not the local judge whose job was to settle secular and financial disputes. He had a far more important work
  - 3. Jesus pointed out that the problem was not with the brother failing to divide the inheritance equitably, but with the man's greed that made him willing to feud with his brother and monopolize Jesus' time.
  - 4. His demand for justice was hiding a deeper, more fundamental problem. The problem with the inheritance was just the last of a long series of moral issues between this man and his brother.
- B. We tend to focus on the wrong problem. We see the present problem and confuse it with the long range goal - Luke 12:16-21
  - 1. He had a right to his goods and the right to enjoy them, but there were higher moral necessities than his rights
  - 2. Prov. 24:30-31 - The problem is not weeds, but the owner's laziness.
  - 3. Ecc. 10:18 - The problem is not the house, but the owner's neglect.

## **II. THE WRONG PRIORITY**

- A. Less important, earthly related, time linked problems frequently interfere with our ability or willingness to see our crucial, eternal, spiritual problems
  - 1. The world's cares capture and hold our attention - Luke 12:22-33
  - 2. Peter lost his faith in and focus on Christ when he fixed his attention on the wind and the waves - Matt. 14:28-33

## **III. THE WRONG ANSWER**

- A. Our own problems and sins interfere with seeing the true problems of others and even of ourselves - Psalm 39
  - 1. David saw the wicked, but decided to not say anything to avoid sin. Instead of helping, it made matters worse - Psalm 39:1-2
  - 2. We often waste our limited time with the wrong answer - Psalm 39:3-6
  - 3. David realized he chosen badly in the past and he had earned and would profit from the discipline God imposed on him - Psalm 39:7-10
  - 4. God showed him what was unimportant - Psalm 39:11
  - 5. David learned the lesson - Psalm 39:12-13
- B. We often exaggerate the miniscule and underestimate the enormous
  - 1. Matt. 7:3-4 - Our own sins and weaknesses can prevent us from seeing and helping the needs of others
    - a. They often facilitate overlooking our own sins in self-examination
    - b. They can lead us to major on minors and minor in the major things; changing light bulbs in a burning house.
- C. Job's friends made that mistake. They saw Job's misery and wrongly concluded that God was punishing Job for some sin he committed - Job 4:7-9
  - 1. Job erred in thinking he was being unjustly punished - Job 23:3-7
  - 2. Elihu corrected their mistakes - Job 32:1-3

3. God charged Job and his three friends, and Job was unable to answer God's questions from his own mistaken viewpoint - Job 40:1-5
  - a. Job thought his suffering was the most important straw
  - b. Job's friends thought his sins were the most important straw
4. God said that His Divine purposes and His alone are the weighty matters that must be accepted - Job 42:1-7
5. Job's suffering was neither a punishment nor the point, but a chance for God to prove His sovereignty and for Job to prove his faith.
6. Job focused on the immediate problem and did not see the long range purpose - Heb. 12:9-11

Conclusion:

- A. The last straw does not break us; it is the whole load borne with pride and not with wisdom
- B. Do not blame the last straw; instead, look inward at your own judgment, reasoning, faith, and endurance
- C. Learn to see the load and the straw with the spiritual mind, not the earthly brain; learn what God says is your most important focus and refuse to allow your attention to be diverted the Adversary's straws.
- D. Paul's thorn in the flesh was just a straw - 2Cor. 12:7-10