

Do Not Worry

Matt. 6:19-34

Jesus' sermon may not be too popular with materialists. Most of us would never identify ourselves as such but still, there is this tendency to explain away some of Jesus' teaching. It seems too radical or irresponsible to be literal and so we find ways to do other than what He has taught. To follow Jesus we must truly give up control of our lives and surrender to Him. One of the areas where this could be most difficult is in the area of our finances. To review, Jesus taught that when you are asked for help you should give it and when someone asks you to loan them money, that you should loan it to them. These teachings presume that you have some money and that it is possible for you to give and to loan. You don't have to have much for this to be true. I have had occasion to know quite a number of people who, while I knew them, were living in various stages of homelessness. One of the characteristics that I have observed among the homeless is how generous they are with each other. They are always loaning and paying back money to one another. Loaning for them, may be a way of saving, as they might not hold on to the money long if they keep it. Then, I have also observed a fair amount of frustration when money has been loaned and it is not paid back in time to meet some pressing need. The point is that you have to have the money in order to give or loan it and so Jesus' teaching implies that His disciples would work and thus have a means of income with which we would then be able to share generously with people in need.

Then, one of the three disciplines that Jesus identified as being improperly practiced in His day was that of giving alms. (Giving to people who are in need) He said that this was not to be done as the religious leaders did it, blowing the trumpet and calling attention to their generosity but that it should be done secretly before our Heavenly Father who sees all things. Our point now is that giving alms is something that Jesus expected His disciples to practice. Again, the premise would be that there is income with which to be generous but once again,

that income is not exclusively yours, for when we surrender to Christ, we also surrender to Him the control over our finances.

Then, Jesus also said that we are not to lay up for ourselves, treasures on earth. It will be much better for us to focus on gathering treasure in heaven. Any material wealth is subject to the corrupting factors represented by moths, rust and thieves. Any material possession is subject to these factors and may be lost. In order to use money in the way that Jesus expects, we must have some but it must not be our treasure. Your treasure is what you love the most. Wherever your treasure is, that is where your heart is also. So we need to pay attention to our motives. If we find ourselves treasuring

material things then our eye is no longer good and we will be spiritually in trouble. Money wants to capture your heart and to be your treasure but we cannot let this happen. You cannot serve God and money.

To sum up, Jesus taught that we should give and loan when asked. The giving of alms to the poor should be a spiritual discipline that we actively practice. And we must be careful to not be obsessed with the accumulation of wealth as this is counterproductive (it won't last) and it tends to compete with God for the possession of our hearts.

These teachings would seem to put a drain upon one's income. A practical response would be, Lord, how am I going to make it? Jesus introduced all of these teachings that will tend 1) to inhibit the accumulation of wealth and 2) to remove the financial outcomes of our lives from our own control. So, verse 25 begins, "Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life..." If you are not in control of your own financial destiny and if instead, God has taken responsibility for this, then, "do not worry." Let's establish one thing up front. You will never be in control of your financial destiny even if you do not surrender this to God. There will always be factors that are out of the realm of your control that will affect your ability to accumulate wealth. Will the stock market go up or down? Will prices of goods rise or fall? Will the company you work for prosper or will it go bankrupt? You can attempt to manage all of the things that happen around your money but another approach would be to surrender your finances to God and

obey the commands of Jesus. Then, you can be assured by Jesus' words, "Do not worry." How is it that the man or woman who surrenders their finances to God will be relieved of worry? Jesus answers this question.

First, Jesus made the point that these worries about finances are misguided. When we worry about what we will eat and what clothes we will wear or even where we will live, our focus is then on questions that are much less important than the issues of right relationship with God and with our neighbors. Jesus asked, "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" According to Jesus, worry about finances is a distraction from the more important things that our lives are really about. Remember when Jesus had fasted for 40 days in the wilderness and had become hungry, the Devil tempted Him saying, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." And Jesus answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Even in the most extreme circumstance Jesus would not allow Himself to put food first. In any financial crisis Jesus would have us remain grounded in the reality that a crisis affecting our food, shelter or clothing can never be the most important thing that is happening in our

lives. We were not created for the experience of having food, shelter and clothing but for the experience of relationship with God.

This is not to say that eating and being clothed has no importance or that God is not acutely aware that we have these needs. Jesus included, "Give us this day our daily bread." in the model prayer. Here, He said, "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" In contrast to these birds who are fed spontaneously every day, we humans do plant and reap and gather into barns, Birds and men make every effort to be fed but our efforts would seem to be more reliable. Still, Jesus argues, if God sees to it that the birds who are less important and whose method of gathering food is less reliable are fed then why would we not trust that He would also care for our need of daily bread seeing that He created us to live in relationship with Him. So, don't worry about your food.

And, what can you actually accomplish by worrying anyway? Jesus used an example of worry over the unchangeable. "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?" In situations that we encounter we need to see the difference between what we can do and what we cannot do. We can determine what should be done and do it. We cannot control the outcome of many issues that we will encounter. So, do the right thing and do not worry about the rest.

Again, Jesus asked, "So why do you worry about clothing?" Then He compared the beauty of the lilies in the field to Solomon in all his glory and concludes - that Solomon was "not arrayed like one of these." Then Jesus repeated His argument of the lesser to the greater. If God clothes the lesser (the lilies of the field) with so much attention to detail and with so much beauty, will He not surely clothe His children who are so much more important to Him than the grass that is alive today and dead tomorrow?

The three concerns that Jesus lists, "What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear?" go to worry over finances. Jesus characterizes an obsession with these concerns as what is typical of the Gentiles. "Gentiles" here is a metaphor for those who have no God and no faith. With no God and no faith, what option is there but to attempt by any means available to maintain control over our financial outcomes. But we live in relationship with our Heavenly Father who loves us as His own children. He knows what we need. He also delights in giving us great gifts. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." Against the natural but absurd notion that we can create for ourselves a sense of security, and believe that we are safe and that nothing can possibly happen that might place us in some sort of jeopardy, Jesus offers us a guarantor who is completely reliable who

always has our best interest in mind and whose resources are inexhaustible, our Heavenly Father. Do you want to trust in yourself or would you rather trust in God?

Faith will often require the counter-intuitive choice. We must start with our motives. What is most important? What treasure are you seeking? Surely, we all live in a world where food, shelter, and clothing exist as needs, not just desires.

But these are not the most important of our needs. We need most of all to be right with God. Jesus taught that we should take care of first things first. Focus on what is most important. And in the arena of our finances, know that there is in mammon, that which seeks to steal your heart and alienate you from God so, choose to obey Christ as He directs you to keep money in its rightful place. Give and loan to those who ask and help the poor. Bring your tithes to your place of worship and make sure that your treasure - what you care the most about - is not of this world where it is subject to moths, rust and thieves. Know that your Heavenly Father with all of His immense resources, loves you and delights in giving you His blessing. He gives us more than we can ask or even think of. You will not find the place of blessing if your objective is to be blessed. Blessing comes when our objective to walk with Jesus because we want to be with Him. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you."

Living this way will free you from worry over the many uncertainties of life. God is never surprised. Trusting in Him keeps you safe. Nothing else can do so.