

## **Sermon on the Mount 4**

### **Give us today our daily bread: Do not be anxious (6:19-34)**

#### **Give, Pray, Fast, Store**

We are getting into some controversial issues regarding life in the Kingdom. However, we need to see them in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. They are about life in the Kingdom. Most of us have come to understand these Christian actions according to our cultural norms, but have ignored what Jesus is saying. We have used an ethical or actional framework. I will argue for these actions to be understood in a relational framework.

I would take a step back this morning and look at the wider context of what Jesus is saying here. In the previous section, Jesus talked about giving, praying and fasting. Today we will talk about storing. Now what have all these in common? Yes, these are things that we do but not directly commanded. There is an option built in. We can choose to give or not to give. We can choose to pray or not to pray; to fast or not to fast; and to store or not to store. We can also choose to do all or some of these things for a variety of motives.

When we are given a command in the scriptures or given something to do, most of the time we interpret or understand those commands according to our cultural understanding or we understand them according to whatever framework we have. This happens even in the church and among Christians. This is not a criticism as we cannot help that. We can only understand things according to what we have in our minds. So, in order to understand something new, we need to change that framework. We need an input from outside of ourselves. And the more we are barricaded in a cultural community, the harder it is to change that framework as the cultural community reinforces those modes of thinking. That is why it has been my belief that we need to break out into those other cultural frameworks and we do that by our willingness to enter into a variety of ethnic groupings. It is enriching. So often we search for sameness in our interaction because it is comfortable.

#### **The General Warning**

Last week we saw that Jesus precedes this section with a general warning.

<sup>1</sup> “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

He warns us regarding the motivation of our actions. As we have said before, it is a matter of the heart. Jesus is asking us here to do a self-check. He is not asking us to do a check on our neighbour or on another. That is why He said later, ‘Do not judge, so that you may not be judged’ (Matt. 7:1). It is a self-check on our heart. And preceding all these is the call to love another. These are not just things that we do because they are commands. We carry out these commands because of love. Love should emanate from the transformed heart.

#### **The Specific Warnings**

So, with each of these actions, Jesus sounded a warning.

<sup>2</sup> “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others.

<sup>5</sup> “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others.

<sup>16</sup> “And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting.

There can be hypocrisy in action. It is the dissonance between the heart and the mind. Some have taught that these are acts which show our Christian testimony. So, we are too afraid not to be seen to give. We are too afraid not to be seen to pray. We are too afraid not to be seen to fast. So, we do these things out of fear or guilt, not from the willingness of the heart. We may then be doing what we think to be the right thing, but with the wrong motive. We are overtly conscious about doing the right thing out of fear of criticism. So, we built into our lives and actions some sort of protective mechanism. We put on the right dressing. We put on the right smile or grin. We say the right words. But that is all an act on the stage of life for people to see. What about the God who looks into the heart? We then justify that by saying that we are doing the right thing for God's sake. But are we really?

### **Store**

Now we come to storing. That is a big and challenging topic and I know that this will step on many toes. It is part of our culture to store. We have superannuation. We build up assets. Some of us feel that storing is simply a part of life. We love to accumulate and get richer. There are others who feel that storing up earthly wealth is not spiritual. But Jesus said,

<sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,  
<sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matt. 6:19-21)

In the days of Moses when they were in the desert and God provided the manna, they were told to store up for the Sabbath day when God will not be giving them the manna on that day. But they were not to store more than what they need. If they do, then the extra will go rotten. This says something about the providence of God. He will supply our need.

What Jesus is saying here is not that we do not store, but that we store up for heaven. What this means is that we need to have our priorities in life. We need to know what we are storing for. Is it for the ultimate comfort that money can bring? Or is it for living out the will of God in our lives? I do not say this as if I can be the judge of what others are doing. Not at all. It is a matter of the heart and I do not have knowledge of that, no matter how close I may be with another. It is something that we each decide before our God and we need to be honest with God and ourselves.

What we are talking all along in the Sermon on the Mount is not about actions, the external expressions of what is inside us. It is all about the motivation of the heart and that needs to be transformed by the Spirit of God. Much of what we think to be Christian actions are merely social or cultural. We have used the social or the cultural to justify the way we live and act. The Sermon on the Mount cuts right into that sort of thinking. Jesus is calling for a return to Him and to act from the new heart that He has put into us.

### **A matter of the heart**

However, we need to examine what Jesus meant when He asked us not to store treasures on earth but in heaven. Some extreme Christian communities have used this to teach against any form of saving? I don't think that is the intention of what Jesus is teaching here. Furthermore, what does storing up treasures in heaven mean? Does it mean that the harder we work for the church or the more we give to the church, then we would be storing up treasures in heaven? I would like to preach to that and it will certainly shore up our support base in the church, but I cannot honestly do that as I will explain. Then does it mean that those acts can be suspended and not practised? Certainly not.

I think most people have formulated their answers from cultural or pietistic approaches. They are all humanistic approaches. That is to say, we take the words of Christ and then attach them to frameworks or approaches that we know. So, when Jesus said that we do not lay up treasures on earth, we take simplistically a pietistic position. So, we make ourselves poor so that we can have treasures in heaven. On the other hand, when we live in a culture of affluence like what we are here in Australia, we then

simply ignore what Jesus said and go our merry way. And the more we have the more we want. We then conform to our affluent culture. In both situations, what emerges is a cultural Christianity. In other words, we have subordinated Jesus to our culture. We no longer regard Him as Lord and are not aware that He continues to reign. 'For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Matt. 6:21).

As we have said all along in the Sermon on the Mount, it is a heart issue. We have always used circumstantial arguments to justify ourselves. When I have not done the power point presentation well and there is a hitch, then I blame it on a technical problem. Sometimes it is, but sometimes, it is because I have not run through the presentation and pick out the problem. Very often it is a human error. So, when someone goes on and on about the circumstances as a justification, you can sense that something is not quite right there.

I don't think Jesus is making out a case regarding whether we should save for the future or not. Let us look at the example of the ant made by the writer of Proverbs.

<sup>6</sup> Go to the ant, you lazybones;  
consider its ways, and be wise.  
<sup>7</sup> Without having any chief  
or officer or ruler,  
<sup>8</sup> it prepares its food in summer,  
and gathers its sustenance in harvest.  
<sup>9</sup> How long will you lie there, O lazybones?  
When will you rise from your sleep?  
<sup>10</sup> A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest,  
<sup>11</sup> and poverty will come upon you like a robber,  
and want, like an armed warrior. (Prov. 6:6-11)

We are exhorted to follow the example of the ant. We are exhorted not to be lazy. Contrary to the argument on not to store, we are here exhorted by the writer to Proverbs to work hard and to store so that we can prepare for the days when poverty comes upon us, or when we are not able to work for a living.

### **The question of intention**

The pertinent question is this, 'What is in our hearts when we put money away?' I cannot answer that for you. We need to be honest before the Lord and answer it in the way that will honour Him. It is not a question of what you do, but it is a question of where the heart is.

I do not propose here to give you a list of what constitutes laying up treasures in heaven. As soon as I put up a list, then that list takes over from the work of the Spirit in your hearts. Then you would do what is in the list and feel justified. That is not what I want to do this morning. Rather I would want you to connect with Christ and with His Spirit so that you can feel one with God and let Him direct your ways. It is praying in the Spirit and asking Him to lead you in His ways. You may put away more or you may put away less, but when the time comes for you to decide what you want to do with what you have stored, that is the test of our obedience. In that situation, the question is not whether to store or not to store. The question then is, are you willing to let the Spirit of God direct you. This is the true laying up of treasures in heaven. It is our oneness with the Father and being able to pray, 'Thy will be done on earth (in me) as it is in heaven'.

The reason we need to think and act in this way is because all that we have and all that we are able to store is given by God. We have not thought of possessions in terms of givenness, i.e. they are given by God. All that we are and all that we are able to do is given by God. In a sense, I do not possess anything. I am only the custodian of all that God has given. So, when I give, it is not I, as Paul says, but Christ in me. So, what I give is from God through me. In other words, the giving is not directly from me even though I have earned that and stored that. The question to us this morning is not the question of whether

to store or not to store? That question is diversionary. The real question for us is what are we storing for or who are you saving it for? That is what Jesus said later on regarding whom we serve.

<sup>24</sup>“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Matt. 6:24)

Our allegiance determines what we do with what we have been given, as all wealth is from the Father. He gives us our daily bread, the co-ordination of the body to serve and to derive a livelihood. What come from the Father must return to Him unconditionally.

### **A vision – how we view things?**

In between these two blocks of themes comes the text we have this morning – ‘The eye is the lamp of the body’. This text is the connecting link between what went before and what is to come after. They are connected by this text. These sections are linked with the theme of vision – how the eye sees. The eye does not emit light, but it receives light and transmits that image to the brain as what we see. So, what does Jesus mean when He says that the eye is the lamp or rather the lamp of the body?

<sup>22</sup>“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, <sup>23</sup> but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! (Matt. 6:22-23)

It is through the eyes that we see light. Jesus is the light of the world. In darkness we cannot see anything. We cannot see the Kingdom of heaven. Our default position is darkness and sin, i.e. sin and all the evil that come with it. The evil eye is a way of saying that one is envious. In other words, when someone is doing well, then one is envious. That is to have an evil eye. So instead of sharing the joy of the success of another, one becomes envious. The problem is not outside of the person, but the problem lies within. It is the way we see things. If our inside is envious or bitter then we will see the world in that way. We won't be able to stand a friend who becomes successful.

On the other hand, if we are true to the way of the Kingdom, then we will see the world differently. If our eye is not evil, then we will not be envious. A good eye will see the world as God has made it. It will see the creator as He should be worshipped and acknowledgment made to His creation, i.e. His people.

There is a problem when we come face to face with grace. It depends on the receiver and the way he views it. It does not mean that when one is gracious, others will receive it with joy. Ultimately it depends on the way in which grace is viewed or received. It depends on how one sees it. It is dependent on the eye, whether it is good or bad. The bad eye will shun grace. It sees grace as an insult on his pride. The good eye will see grace as it is and respond with thanks and gratitude.

A question remains for us. How do we get a good eye? Or put another way, how did our eye become bad? The fact is all of us have bad eyes. This is because we are driven by our biases, our fears and anxiety, our anger and resentment. This is our fallen state, the state of our alienation from God. We have gone our own way. We may think that we are alright, but we are not alright until we have been restored by God through the cross of Jesus Christ. Through the cross, He takes away our biases, our fears and anxiety, our anger and resentment to trust in Him and to depend on Him. We then learn to see things as Jesus saw it. We then learn to say, ‘Thy will be done’, instead of pursuing our own prejudices and seeking to control everything and everyone.

Many of us see God with factors deleted from the equation. One assumption is that we are all born good and are able to fend for ourselves in all things. No, we can't. There is an inbuilt rebellion within us against the things of God and we can't do a thing about it. We need the cross and the redemption that comes through the cross to enable us to see things right. We need the continual teaching from the word of God to enable us to continually transform our lives and our thoughts.

A couple wanted to move into a new suburb and found a lovely house. They went to the man next door to ask what the people in the suburb are like. The man asked him where he lived and what his neighbourhood was like. The couple told him that their neighbourhood was bad and that was why they are moving. The man replied that his neighbourhood was the same. Another couple also like the house and they too went to this man next door to ask what the neighbourhood was like. The man asked them the same question and they replied that the people in their neighbourhood were nice. They needed a bigger place and that was why they were moving. The man replied that the neighbourhood is the same.

So, you see, the problem with what we see is within us. If our eye is healthy, i.e. restored to health through the cross, then we are full of light, i.e. the light of the world, Jesus Christ. We must not see things through the coloured lenses in our eye, but only through the pristine clear glass of the cross.

### **Our life and anxiety**

<sup>25</sup> “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> 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? <sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. <sup>34</sup> “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matt.6:25-34)

Having taught regarding storing and the way we see things, Jesus addresses the issue of anxiety. Of course, we store for the rainy day as we have seen in the example of the ant in Proverbs. Of course, we need to think about the duties and our responsibilities for the next day and the next week, like what one would need to prepare to speak to the church the following Sunday. Sometimes there would be some anxiety because of problems arising in the church, as Paul says, ‘And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches’ (2 Cor. 11:28). This is our responsibility and the way pastors deal with this is by coming before the Lord in prayer seeking guidance. Jesus is not addressing this. What Jesus is referring to is the lack of trust in the providential God of the Kingdom.

‘Give us this day our daily bread’ is an acknowledgment of the God who provides for our every need including the neuro-synapses that activate our every movements ‘for in Him we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28). This is also a reference to the wandering in the wilderness where God supplied the ‘manna’ for the Israelites. They were to collect only what was enough for the needs of the day. It was pointless to keep for the next day as God would provide for their needs then. Living this way requires trust in the faithfulness of God and His covenantal promises.

Life in the Kingdom of God is a life of faith, faith in the God who provides. As Peter wrote, ‘casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you’ (1 Pet. 5:7), because our ‘heavenly Father knows that you need them all’ (Matt. 6:32). So, Jesus finishes this section with a call to ‘seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you’ (Matt. 6:32-33). Yet so many people seek the Kingdom for ‘all these things’, not primarily for the Kingdom sake. This is a grave error. Finally, I want to leave you with these few lines.

Living on earth, heart in heaven  
Earthly eyes see form, spirit’s eyes see heaven’s treasure.  
Living on earth, heart in heaven  
Eyes in darkness, spirit’s eyes shines God’s light.  
Living on earth, heart in heaven  
Tomorrow brings anxiety, but comfort comes today.