

The Sermon On The Mount

The Beautiful Tune We Love So Well And Play So Poorly

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:3 ESV)*

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”
(Matthew 7:24–25 ESV)*

Do Not Be Anxious About Your Life

July 17th, 2022

Matthew 6:25-34

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Matthew 6:25. We’ve been taking a long, slow walk through the Sermon on the Mount, which as we’ve said a few times now, is not a sermon about how to get saved, rather it is a sermon about how saved people should live. This is instruction FOR and TO DISCIPLES and it will be helpful for us to remember that as we get into the passage that hopefully you have open before you now. I’ll be reading from verse 25 through to verse 34. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

“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? ²⁶ 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? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ 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? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly

Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:25–34 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Anxiety, of course is a HUGE topic in our culture. The number of people in this country being treated for anxiety is rising at an alarming rate – fuelled, in part by the prolonged stress event we just endured due to COVID19. A recent StatsCan report released in September of 2021 indicated that:

one in four (25%) Canadians aged 18 and older screened positive for symptoms of depression, anxiety or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in spring 2021, up from one in five (21%) in fall 2020.¹

So obviously we are interested in this TOPIC, but we need to be careful not to read this passage through the lens of our current cultural conversation – I think that would be distorting, to say the least, so I want to take a careful and deliberate approach here. I want to spend some time making sure that we UNDERSTAND what Jesus is saying and not saying before we move on to the very important matter of application.

Understanding The Text:

In terms of understanding the text, the first thing we need to be careful to observe here is how it fits in with the overall argument and flow of the Sermon on the Mount.

1. Argument and flow

¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210927/dq210927a-eng.htm>

Hopefully you still have your Bible open in front of you. What's the first word in the passage we are looking at today? It is the word THEREFORE. And what are you supposed to do whenever you see the word therefore? You are supposed to go back to see what it is THERE FOR. And when we do that we immediately realize that this is not an isolated sermon on anxiety in general – this is a follow up to what Jesus has just been talking about with respect to money. Jesus has just finished talking about how you cannot serve both God and money. Money is a good tool and a bad god. It is WRONG for the followers of Jesus to worship money as an idol – that's what he's been saying and now here in this related paragraph, Jesus is saying that it is also WRONG for his followers to WORRY obsessively about money. These are obviously two sides of the same coin. Christians aren't supposed to WORSHIP money and Christians aren't supposed to WORRY about money – that's what we're being told.

And that takes us to the matter of limitations.

2. Limitations

Jesus is not addressing ALL forms of anxiety. He is speaking in a very focused and delimited manner. You can see that in the opening verse. Look at what he says:

“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.” (Matthew 6:25 ESV)

Jesus is talking here about ANXIETY WITH RESPECT TO FINANCIAL NECESSITIES; things like food, drink and clothing.

So this passage is FAR NARROWER than most people tend to think. To be clear, Jesus is not saying that ALL ANXIETY is sinful. In fact some anxiety is wise, necessary and appropriate.

D.A. Carson in his commentary on this passage says:

“There is a sense in which worry is not only good, but its absence is, biblically speaking, irresponsible.”²

Listen, friends, there are things you should be worried about. I’m a parent. I’m trying to raise 5 kids in this crazy culture – filled with influences and values and deceptions the likes of which you and I could not have even imagined 20, 30 or 40 years ago. The amount of temptation and confusion and misinformation constantly bombarding our children represents a REASONABLE cause for anxiety and concern. In fact, I’d argue that if you aren’t worried about your kids growing up in this culture you’ve lost your mind and you should probably lose your licence to parent; do you know what I’m saying? These are difficult times.

Now – I’m not panicking. We’re not moving to the North Pole. But I’m praying more and I am constantly vigilant. And that’s appropriate – the absence of that kind of anxiety would be irresponsible.

And I think it is appropriate for us to be worried about the health of the church. I know that the church will win in the end, because Jesus said:

“I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18 ESV)

So the long term prospects for the church are really good – but in the short term there is reasonable cause for anxiety. We are living through what may end up being classified as the greatest season of apostasy in the history of Christianity. People are falling away, left right and centre in places that have historically been Christian strongholds. The church in North America is undergoing a season of SEVERE PRUNING and paring back. Long term, I think it is going to be great – but in the short term, it is a cause for a certain amount of anxiety and there is nothing wrong with that, the Apostle Paul said that apart from all my other problems:

² D.A. Carson, *The Sermon On The Mount: An Evangelical Exposition Of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 84.

“there is the daily pressure on me **of my anxiety for all the churches.**” (2 Corinthians 11:28 ESV)

So again – there are certain things you should be anxious about – but this passage isn’t talking about those things. Jesus says:

“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.” (Matthew 6:25 ESV)

This passage is focused on ANXIETY ABOUT FINANCIAL NECESSITIES.

And again it will be helpful for us to remember that this teaching was given to a particular audience.

3. Audience

The Sermon on the Mount was a sermon that Jesus preached TO HIS DISCIPLES – not to the crowds, not to the seekers – but to his followers and that is important for us to see. It would have been cruel, almost, if Jesus had said this to people in general. If you were just some random poor person in the Roman Empire at that time you would have some legitimate reasons to be anxious. There were no social programs in the Roman Empire for poor people and there was no motivation for mercy within the worldview of Roman paganism – so a little bit of anxiety might have been appropriate – but Jesus isn’t speaking to those people – he is speaking to his followers. He is speaking to the foundation of the Christian church and he is saying: “You have no need to worry about this stuff.”

Now why would he say that?

Well for one thing, the believer knows that there is a God in the heavens who CARES deeply about all creation. Afterall, the Bible begins with the words:

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1 ESV)

So the believer knows this world is not an accident. The believer knows that there is a Creator and this world was made GOOD. It has the capacity to support and nourish all forms of life – and particularly human life.

And secondly, the believer knows that God loves him – or her! That’s the whole point of the little flower illustration. Jesus is saying that, for crying out loud, God loves FLOWERS which are here today and gone tomorrow – but because he loves them, while they are here, he takes care of them – well then, how much more should you expect him to take care of you?

And then of course, in addition to all that, the believer knows that God has given us the church! And the church takes care of its own.

There were resources that a Christian person in the ancient world had that a regular Roman person did not have. We talked about this last week, in Acts 4, people are selling valuable properties in order to provide for the basic financial necessities of poor people who were moving to Jerusalem in order to be part of the church. This wasn’t just characteristic of the church in the first generation – this went on for centuries! The historian Rodney Stark talks about this as one of the main reasons why Christianity eventually took over the Roman Empire. He says:

“Because theirs were communities of mercy and self-help, Christians did have longer, and better lives. This was apparent and must have been extremely appealing. Indeed, the impact of Christian mercy was so evident that in the fourth century when the emperor Julian attempted to restore paganism, he exhorted the pagan priesthood to compete with the Christian charities. In a letter to the high priest of Galatia, Julian urged the distribution of grain and wine to the poor, noting that “the impious Galileans (Christians), in addition to their own, support ours, and it is shameful that our poor should be wanting our aid.””³

It wasn’t for no reason that Jesus told his people not to worry about their financial necessities. They had a good God, they had a good world and they had a good church – and therefore they could afford to focus on other things.

³ Rodney Stark, *The Triumph Of Christianity* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 118.

And that prepares us to state the main principle being set forward in this text.

4. Principle

Jesus is saying here, essentially the same thing that he said in verses 19-24. As I said, these are two sides of the same coin. He is saying that we must be SINGULAR in our loyalty, allegiance and FOCUS. We cannot WORSHIP money and neither can we obsessively WORRY about money – to do either of those things is to give money too much significance – too much centrality in our lives. This section, like the one that comes before it in the Sermon on the Mount, is about PRIORITY and PERSPECTIVE. Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones says here:

“What our Lord is warning us against, therefore, is the danger of thus being distracted from the main objective in life by care, by this anxiety about earthly, worldly things, by looking so much at them that we do not look at God”⁴

That’s what the text is about! Again, this is the point Jesus was making by means of that illustration about the EYE being like the window of your house. The KJV helps us see that, they have it:

“if therefore **thine eye be single**, thy whole body shall be full of light. ²³ But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.” (Matthew 6:22–23 KJV)

If you are NOT SINGULARLY FOCUSED on God – if you are sometimes focused on God and sometimes focused on money – if you are sometimes serving God and sometimes serving money – then your whole life is going to be filled with darkness and shadow. You’ve got to be aiming at ONE THING and ONE THING ONLY. You’ve got to have ONE THING and ONE THING ONLY at the centre and as the foundation of your life – and everything else has to fall back into its proper orbit. You get the same basic punchline here that you got up in verse 24. This time Jesus puts it this way, he says:

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 381.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33 ESV)

Put the Big Rock in first, and put everything else in after that. That’s the principle. That is what is Jesus is teaching to his disciples in this text.

So how do we apply that?

Applying The Text: How Can I Live A Life Free From Financial Anxiety?

We’ve talked many times now about how the Sermon on the Mount is like a tuning fork. It tells us how Christianity is supposed to sound – not necessarily how it DOES sound. The Sermon on the Mount is the standard – and here it is telling us that the followers of Jesus do not WORSHIP money nor do they STRESS about money. They are not characterized by excessive and consuming ANXIETY about financial necessities.

So how do we get there? How can we bring ourselves back in tune on this important matter? With the time we have left, let me suggest to you the following actions and commitments.

1. Develop the habit of thanksgiving and prayer

Anxiety is an internal response to an external set of circumstances. If a tiger falls through the roof of your house while you are having a nap on the couch, you are going to feel some anxiety – and your body is going to respond in predictable ways – that’s not a sin. That’s you being human. The issue is what you do with it. The Apostle Peter didn’t deny the reality of anxiety, rather he said:

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7 NIV11)

The Apostle Paul said something similar to his people; he said in Philippians 4:6:

“do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” (Philippians 4:6 ESV)

Now remember, this is the same Apostle Paul who said that he wrestled with the daily pressure of “my anxiety for all the churches” (2 Corinthians 11:28 ESV), so he is not denying the existence of anxiety, rather he is just saying that the way to process it is to take it to the Lord in prayer.

When you are feeling anxious about your financial necessities – go to the Lord in prayer! Tell him what you need. Pray the fourth petition in the Lord’s Prayer: “Give us this day our daily bread.” And remember that you are praying to YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER – so expect a good and wise result. Jesus will go on to say that very thing in the next chapter. He says:

Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matthew 7:9–11 ESV)

Even earthly dads – fallen and sinful as we are – generally speaking want to give good things to our kids. We want to give them bread, we want to give them meat and we do, to the best of our ability, so if that is true for us, how much more should we expect it to be true of our Father who art in heaven?

So when we pray to God – if we are followers of Jesus Christ – we are praying to a Father who loves us and who wants to give us good and wise things – and knowing that ought to dramatically reduce our anxiety. Our God is a good God. He knows us, he loves us – and he owns the cattle on a thousand hills – so chill out! Tell him what you need, and trust him to do what is right.

And remember to thank him for what he’s already done – Paul says that too. In Philippians 4:6 he puts requests and thanksgiving together – why? Because if we remember to THANK GOD for all the things he has already given us, then it will further reduce our anxiety with respect to the OTHER THINGS that we need. If God gave us THAT then surely he can be counted on to give us THIS – that’s the idea.

The habit of prayer and thanksgiving should dramatically reduce the level of your anxiety with respect to financial necessities.

The second thing you can do to make progress against the standard being set in this passage would be to commit to hard work and making the most of all your opportunities.

2. Commit to working hard and making the most of your opportunities

In the Bible, MIRACLES are never intended to REPLACE hard work, personal responsibility and effort. We see that in the story of the manna in the Old Testament. When the people of Israel were wandering in the desert – before they had been brought into the Promised Land, God fed them a daily supply of MANNA. It was a miracle! It was literally “bread from heaven”. But then, as soon as they crossed into their inheritance, the miracle stopped. Joshua 5:12 says:

“And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.” (Joshua 5:12 ESV)

As soon as they could feed themselves, they were required to feed themselves. The miracle stopped! We talked about this last week; the Bible says:

“If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.” (2 Thessalonians 3:10 ESV)

The faith of the Bible assumes that you are going to work hard so as to support yourself and your family. So, if you aren't working hard – or if you WON'T work hard, then you should be anxious about your financial necessities. God isn't going to give you a miracle when you can and should be working hard to support yourself. When you go to God in prayer, you want to make sure that you have positioned yourself to receive. You want to make sure that you have done what you are responsible to do – and when it comes to financial necessities you are required to work hard.

That's the point of the illustration Jesus gives about the birds. Look at the birds he says! They work hard but they aren't stressed out. The early bird knows that as long as he wakes up early and

is willing to get his nose dirty, he's going to get a worm – well brothers and sisters, so it is with us. Be like a bird. Work hard but don't worry – the Lord has given us a good planet and there is food, drink and clothing out there for those who are willing to work.

And in case you should run into an exception to that general rule – and there are some - the third thing you can do to reduce your anxiety around financial necessities would be to:

3. Plant yourself in a healthy local church

The Bible acknowledges that sometimes things happen that result in even hard-working people not having enough sufficient resources to support themselves. Proverbs 13:23 says:

“The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.” (Proverbs 13:23 ESV)

Sometimes CIRCUMSTANCES or INJUSTICE keeps us from experiencing the proper reward for our toil – so what about that, the anxious brother or sister might ask. Well, in such circumstances, be thankful for the additional mercy of a healthy local church. The consistent vision, Old Testament and New is for there to be NO POVERTY within the covenant community. In Deuteronomy 15:4 Moses tells the people that if they obey the Lord and do what he is telling them to do then:

“there will be no poor among you; for the LORD will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess” (Deuteronomy 15:4 ESV)

Now of course, the people in the Old Testament didn't obey God. They didn't give what they were supposed to give, they didn't trust like they were supposed to, they didn't treat people the way they were supposed to – they frequently abused the vulnerable and seized land from the poor through injustice – so this vision was never realized – until the person and work of Christ. But then, by his grace, and through the gift of his Holy Spirit we do begin to see the realization of this vision. We get a snapshot of that in the New Testament - we talked about this last week; when a

bunch of people moved to Jerusalem to become part of the only operating Christian church in the Roman Empire at that time, the Bible says:

“There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold³⁵ and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.” (Acts 4:34–35 ESV)

The church takes care of her own! She always has – and the real church always will.

I won’t use any names, but I can tell you this happens here all the time. Just this past week we cut a cheque for a person who had a workplace injury and who needed some help to meet some short-term financial obligations. I won’t ask for a show of hands but there are an awful lot of people in this room who have benefitted from that kind of support in the past. And that’s exactly how it is supposed to be! Now, we’re not going to buy you a motorcycle or a ski boat, but if you get laid off or you get injured on the job and you are a member of this church – you don’t need to be anxious about your financial necessities. We’ve got your back. You won’t be sleeping on the streets; your kids aren’t going to miss a meal. We’ve got you; so:

“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.” (Matthew 6:25 ESV)

We’ve got you covered – HE’S got you covered. Thanks be to God!

And that leads us to our landing place. There is no need to be stressed out about financial necessities, brothers and sisters – rather:

4. Seek first the Kingdom of God

I love what Spurgeon says here, he says:

“Seek God first, and the rest will follow in due course. As for ‘*all these things*’, you will not need to seek them; they will be thrown in as a matter of course.”⁵

That’s it exactly! It isn’t as though these things don’t matter for the believer – these things matter for everybody – we’re not saying they’re not important, we are saying that if you just PURSUE GOD – if you just seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness – you will receive GOD and all these other, lesser things as a matter of course.

So what wisdom is there in maintaining a divided focus in your life? Only one thing matters: Pursue the Lord. Worship the Lord. Worry about the Lord. Serve him. Obey him. Seek his kingdom and his righteousness – and all these things shall be added unto you; thanks be to God!

Let’s pray together.

⁵ C.H. Spurgeon, *Commentary On Matthew: The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 67.