

Matthew 6:19-34

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[0 : 00] I suspect that the words cost of living will have crossed your lips at some point this week.

! And if the words didn't cross your lips, I suspect that you will have certainly thought about them in some way. The concept will have entered your thinking. Worry about money is commonplace at the best of times, but it has clicked up a few notches in the last year, especially in London.

Partly because London is an expensive place to live, partly because we see the trappings of wealth all around us in a city like London, we've been told that the good life is found in having those things, and we strive for them, and we worry when we don't have them, and we need money to get them, and those go together.

Partly also because we've convinced ourselves that more money is the answer to the problems that we have in life. More money will sort everything out, so we worry because we want to make more. Well, this evening Jesus is talking to us about anxiety in relation to money and what money provides, and He gives us a kingdom perspective on these things that is very simple. He says, don't worry. Don't worry. Three times He says it.

[1 : 26] Verse 25, do not be anxious about food or clothing. Verse 31 again, do not be anxious about food or clothing. Verse 34, do not be anxious about what tomorrow might bring.

Does Jesus know that we're in a cost of living crisis? Is what He says reasonable when things are as tight as they are for many of us?

Well, let's see, shall we? Let's see, as we walk through the passage where, first off, Jesus exposes the root of our financial anxiety when He addresses, point number one, the priorities that create an anxious soul.

Here are the priorities that create an anxious soul. And the first one, verse 19, is the priority of having the wrong treasure. The wrong treasure. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

[2 : 36] Jesus, very clearly contrasting earthly and heavenly treasure. And He warns the person who sets their heart on the earthly variety. Now, you can do this whether you have much or little.

This person might do this as an ambition. They don't have much and so their ambition is to lay up treasure on earth. Or they may have plenty of it already and they store it up for themselves.

There could be a number of reasons why they do that, but that's what they do. Storing up. The idea is that you can never have enough. It's like J.D. Rockefeller. A beloved illustration of the preacher on this passage.

Rockefeller, one time the richest person in the world. They reckon that given his time, he was an oil businessman in America. Given his time, he's the richest person that's ever lived.

And nearing his death, he was asked, Mr. Rockefeller, how much is enough? And he said, just a little bit more. That's how we think, isn't it?

[3 : 43] Whether we have much or little, we think just a little bit more. That'll be enough. Then it'll be okay. And Jesus says that prioritizing the earthly over the heavenly is the wrong way round. And it's the wrong way round because here is an insecure place to invest.

Earth is where moths fly around and eat our stuff. It's where rust gets after things. And where global financial decisions can wipe out your investment portfolio in a second.

And if they don't get it, they're always the thieves. The thieves that are lurking, ready to take what you have for themselves. When you think about it, those things are why even the very rich are anxious about their wealth.

Because they know that it's vulnerable. It comes and it goes. They know that they can easily lose it all. I was at the 70th birthday party of a wealthy friend of mine a few years ago.

And it was a grand affair because he's very wealthy. And he made a speech as part of this party. And in his speech, he referred to life incredibly wealthy.

[4 : 55] Here he is, 70 years old. The poor people that were there, like me, would have been thinking, Well, look, he's made it. He has everything. And yet he described life as climbing the wall of worry.

I'm sitting there thinking, he has nothing to worry about. He can pay his way out of any problem he has. That's not how he thinks about it. Because earth is where the moths fly around.

It's where rust gets after things. And it's where the thieves are always knocking about. By contrast, Jesus says, If you want to invest in the most secure place possible, in heavenly treasure, there is no wall of worry.

There's no wall of worry because none of those threats can touch it. There is no decay and there is no theft. Now, as you think about this, how can you tell, how can you tell which kind of treasure you're pursuing?

Because Jesus, of course, isn't against saving. He's not against wise financial planning. The book of Proverbs is full of stuff about that, about prudent decisions with our money to provide.

[6 : 06] We are to provide for our families. Paul says that to Timothy. So, how can you tell whether you're investing in the right or the wrong treasure? Jesus says, Follow your heart.

Your heart will tell you. That is, what do you care about the most?

Where your treasure is, verse 21, there your heart will be also. The thing that you care about the most will tell you about your treasure. The heart is the control center of the whole person.

So, Jesus is saying, whatever people value is who they truly are. So, what does your heart pursue? What does your heart pursue in the quest for joy and satisfaction and flourishing?

The context of the sermon. More money in and of itself. More of the stuff that money can buy.

Where your treasure is.

[7 : 09] That thing that you've set your heart on for happiness. That's where your heart will be. This is who you are. First priority that leads to an anxious soul is having the wrong treasure.

Jesus then moves us from the wrong treasure to where the heart, that kind of heart that's pursuing the wrong treasure, can often go. Secondly, the wrong attitude. Verse 21, Verse 21, The eye is the lamp of the body, so if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.

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. If treasure on earth is your priority, Jesus says, this is usually what happens.

So, interesting use of language here. What Jesus is talking about when he's referring to a healthy eye, it's a Hebrew idiom used to describe generosity. By contrast then, having a bad eye is also a way of saying someone is tight or stingy or miserly.

If you are generous, Jesus says, then your whole life will be full of light, full of blessing, and vice versa. It's interesting that a generosity, when it comes to money, affects your whole life positively.

[8 : 30] If you are generous with your money, it affects all of your life positively. And if you are tight, if you are a miser, when it comes to money, that affects your whole life in a detrimental way as well. Your whole body will be full of darkness, he says.

Being generous with your money affects your whole life positively. Being tight and stingy affects it negatively. Our attitude to money, Jesus is saying, will play out in every area of our lives.

It will play out in all the corners of our lives. The anxiety that makes us unwilling to be generous, unwilling to be generous to others, will be felt in, for example, our hospitality or lack of it.

Our spending or lack of it. Our attitude to how much everything we do is costing money. Money. You see, if we have set our heart on the wrong treasure, it affects the way we live in all kinds of different areas of our lives.

The issue is the level of control that money has over us. The issue is how much our thinking about it consumes our life. And so again, in this case, the amount, the actual amount is irrelevant.

[9 : 42] You can be consumed by money with lots of it or not very much. The problem isn't the amount. The problem is the mastery that it has over us. The control that it has over our hearts.

Which is where Jesus goes next. So, wrong priority, number one, wrong treasure. Wrong priority, the priority that leads to anxiety, number two, wrong attitude.

Whether our attitude is greedy or stingy, what that does is demonstrate we have, thirdly, the wrong attitude. The wrong master. The wrong master. 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 or God and mammon. It doesn't matter how gifted we are. We can only serve one master. You can't serve two. You can't serve two. You can't go two ways at once. You can't serve two masters when they demand different things of you.

[10:44] So, again, we are hearing Jesus challenge the disconnect between heart and life that has run like a thread all the way through the sermon. So, with the first half of the chapter, just as you can't live for the praise of others and the praise of God, so you can't live for money and live for God.

God is only interested in our wholehearted, single-minded devotion. So, money is given by God as a servant, and we must keep it in the place of a servant.

As someone once said, God doesn't mind his people having money. He does mind money having his people. So, the question as we assess how we're going on this is, let's be honest, who's in charge?

Who's in charge? Who is my master? Money is a very useful servant that will do lots of good things for us, but it is a terrible master.

And it's a terrible master not just because you can have lots and lots and lots of it and get to a point in your life where you still describe life as climbing the wall of worry, but because the anxiety runs out into all the corners of our lives.

[12:09] So, if those are the priorities that create an anxious soul, what is the answer? Well, in a sense, Jesus has already made that clear. Store up heavenly treasure, use your money to be generous to others, and make sure that God and not money is in charge.

But how do we get to that point? It's all very well saying that. How do we get to that point? Well, then, this is where Jesus goes next. He says, verse 25, Therefore, I tell you.

That is, on account of the fact that living for money as your master is absolutely hopeless, let me suggest a better way. In showing us the priorities that cause an anxious soul, he then secondly outlines the path that cures an anxious soul.

Point number two, the path that cures an anxious soul. What does it involve? Well, first of all, it involves trusting your father's care. 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? If Jesus had said here, do not be anxious, full stop, let's pray together, that would have been useless.

[13:27] Have you seen, it's still kicking around on YouTube, it's a few years old now, but it's a sketch by the comedian Bob Newhart. And he is, in the sketch, he is a therapist, and a lady comes in, and he says, do have a seat, and she sits down, and he sits on the edge of his table in a very kind of concerned way, and listens to her as she says, I keep doing this, and I keep doing that, and I keep doing the other, and he listens very attentively, and he said, I'm about to say something very profound to you here.

Stop it! Utterly useless, isn't it? So it would be if all Jesus said was, do not be anxious. It's no help at all.

But that's not what he does. He says that, and then he lays out the reasons why our Father can be trusted. And why he can be trusted in such a way that drives out anxiety, and I want to say, even in a cost of living crisis.

Well, what are the reasons? Reason number one, he sustains verse 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? It's an argument from the lesser to the greater. And perhaps with a note of incredulity in his voice, Jesus says, have you not stopped to think about even the humble sparrow?

[14:51] Birds don't grow crops or store up food that they've harvested, and yet God provides for them day in, day out, day in, day out. And if this is true even of them, how much more can he be trusted to care for his highly valued humans who bear his image?

Think about it. God made you in his image, and he called you to his Son, and he gave you eternal life. Will he not much more provide for you than a little bird?

And then there's a gentle rebuke, verse 27. And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life?

Worrying about what you'll eat or drink will not add one bit to the life that you're seeking out. The worry doesn't achieve anything. It's like Jesus is considering us to, is forcing us to consider the

pointlessness of anxiety.

When anxiety can do nothing to make you more secure, or more comfortable, or more invested in the life of righteousness that he's calling his followers to. Anxiety cannot change the number when you press check balance on the ATM.

[16:10] It can do nothing about it. And so Jesus is saying, why would you be anxious about it? And hasn't he just given us? We saw last week a pattern to follow. Verse 11, give us this day our daily bread.

Anxiety about where your sustenance comes from needs to be swallowed up in God-dependent prayer, trusting in your Father's care.

Then comes the same argument from a different angle. Our Father sustains, but he also clothes. Verse 28. He sustains, he clothes. And why are you anxious 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 arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothed the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you? Oh, you of little faith. Look at the flowers. I'm not really into flowers, but I can still appreciate the detail and the delicacy of the colors and the subtlety of the different shades.

[17:20] Some flowers are simply stunning. Maybe I am into flowers now that I think about it. Every season comes around and people rave about this new range by this or that new designer.

But their work doesn't come close to the originality and the beauty of the Father's design in nature. Well, says Jesus, if your Father has so lavishly provided for the flowers, the flowers that have an even shorter season than fashion, here today, gone tomorrow, how much more will he provide for your needs?

And again, he brings a rebuke at the end. Anxiety about these things, verse 30, is faithless. Oh, you of little faith. Fails to trust the care of our Father in heaven.

The logic is very sound, isn't it? If God sustains and provides for the things that are of the least value, can you, whom he loves so deeply, not trust yourself to his care?

Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear? As citizens of the kingdom, we don't need to be anxious.

[18:31] We have a Father who cares. We have a Father who provides, who protects, and he holds us in his hands. In fact, Jesus explains just how out of place it is. Verse 32, for the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

This kind of thing belongs to those. Anxiety about these things belongs to those who don't know God as their Father. Just as they prayed back verses 7 and 8 in ways that showed that they didn't know him, that they didn't know his grace in their lives, so here their anxiety reflects a similar ignorance of God's care that disciples of the Lord Jesus receive from their Father.

It reads like Jesus spoke these words gently, or you can certainly read it in that way. But when we put them together, Jesus' rebukes here are withering.

He's unequivocal in what he's saying. This kind of anxiety is pointless, faithless, and godless. It's pointless, faithless, and godless.

We're not left in any doubt. So, the first step to chasing anxiety is actually trusting our Father's care. The second follows.

[19:47] It's pursuing your Father's kingdom. Pursuing your Father's kingdom, verse 33. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

When Jesus says seek first here, he's saying prioritize. Prioritize. Make this your singular aim. Put this to the very top of the list. Yet again, he's pointing us towards wholehearted discipleship.

To the pursuit of the kind of righteousness that surpasses the superficial and the external and the kind of pharisaical righteousness that he's been pointing at all the way through the sermon.

What he wants is kingdom righteousness. A single mind, a single heart. This is actually why he's been making such a big deal about this issue.

Being taken up with money, food, or clothing, or possessions, to the extent that it makes you anxious, is to have a divided heart. It is to have two masters. But if we remember back to the first section of the sermon, one of the distinguishing marks of those who are part of this kingdom is that they hunger and thirst for righteousness.

[20:59] And we're told, 548, that they are whole. That is, they're undivided as their heavenly Father is whole. The translation here is perfect, but we talked about it as wholeness.

Single-minded, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, that's the top priority, and we will be whole as we emulate our Father.

As Jesus has said, leave anxiety about these things to those who don't know God. We don't need to be anxious. We can leave that to people that don't know God as their Father. Because the King has come, because the kingdom is here in Jesus Christ, we pursue Christ, and we're taken up with His kingdom and all that that entails.

One of the mistakes we might make when we hear Jesus contrasting heaven and earth here is He contrasts the future that is permanent and secure and the present that is insecure.

When we hear that contrast, it is to think that what we need to do is hold on and wait for the end. Just get through, here and now, and wait for the end.

[22 : 08] Wait for that which is permanent. But verse 33 here reminds us that the Christian life is not passive like that. We come in through poverty of spirit, chapter 5, verse 3. We recognize that we have sinned against God and we don't deserve any part of His kingdom.

But that through faith in Jesus, His life, His death, and His resurrection, we are drawn into the kingdom and adopted by our Heavenly Father. That humbles us. That is the heart of the Christian good news.

Our salvation is all the work of God and He draws us to Himself and brings us into His family all by His grace. Nothing that we do, we simply respond. And when we see that as we truly should see it, when we see it clearly as it is, it humbles us.

It humbles us. That is, we say, nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross of Christ I cling. And in that humility, we come into the kingdom.

But that humility continues as we actively seek to live the wholehearted, distinctive life to which we are called as citizens of that kingdom. The life that He empowers us to live by His Spirit.

[23 : 17] And we live like this so that His will is done, verse 10, on earth as it is in heaven. On earth as it is in heaven.

When we see things like that, when we see things this way, we can leave anxiety about the future, verse 34. We can leave that anxiety to worry about itself.

When our Father has come, when we see that He has come to us in Christ with such grace, and we are so secure, and the life that we live, we do in the power of the Holy Spirit under His guidance and His love and His care.

We can leave worry to others. Jonathan Pennington, who has written a great book on the Sermon on the Mount, says this, The final solution then to the anxiety about money problem is to set one's heart and mind to seeking God's way of being in the world and His coming reign, which promises to result in all of one's needs being truly met.

This is the next decisive step on the path to cure an anxious soul. But verse 33 does leave us with a question, doesn't it?

[24 : 39] It seems that Jesus here has made a direct connection between faithfulness and provision. All these things will be added to you. The question is, well, what about the faithful Christians who have not experienced this provision?

Those who have starved or gone without their basic needs being met? Well, this is part of a bigger question about the providence of God, one that runs really all the way through the Bible. And for a kind of extensive treatment, we don't have time now.

But we should acknowledge, as one theologian has said, that the sermon is no different from the rest of Scripture in making true promises that reflect God's character and care, but which all fly under the banner of God's mysterious providence and submission to His will in faith.

And we can think about that, and we can try and intellectualize it and process it, but of course our model here must be the Lord Jesus Himself.

The one who, when His needs weren't met, trusted Himself to His Father's care and pursued the righteousness of the kingdom. If we think of the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' needs went unmet, as we would have perceived them, and yet He knew His Father does all things well.

[25 : 59] And so He could pray, not my will, but Yours be done. That's our prayer when the future is unclear.

That's our prayer when we don't know how ends are going to meet. Because that is the posture of faith in the face of the mysterious providence of God, and that is what we must pray as we seek God's kingdom.

The kingdom of our Father, the one who holds us in His hand, even when ends don't seem like they're going to meet.

So, Jesus couldn't make the contrast clearer. When you pursue money for yourself apart from God, the result is never the sole peace that you're seeking, it's only anxiety. When you store up treasure on earth, when that is your goal, anxiety always follows.

But whatever our circumstances, however uncertain our financial situation might be, Jesus can tell us that when we trust our Father's care and pursue our Father's kingdom, we are freed from anxiety to grow and flourish as those who know the Sermon on the Mount, blessedness of living in the love of our Heavenly Father.

[27 : 17] Let's pray together.