

December 27, 2020 | Standalone Teaching

Matthew 6:19-34 | “Faith In The Midst Of A Worrisome World”

Every time we come to the end of a year, we inevitably look back on what we’ve experienced. I assume it’s not a stretch to say that 2020, more than any other, has given us all experiences we will not soon forget. Sad to say, some of those experiences have been rather unpleasant, to say the least.

I will be the first to admit that I had more than a few dark and depressing days during this pandemic. And, truth be told, because of all the bad I’ve experienced in 2020, I’m walking into 2021 with a fair bit of trepidation and anxiety, which, in turn, fuels my brooding cynicism.

I doubt that I’m alone in this regard. Actually, I know I’m not alone. I only need to turn on the news, go on the socials, or talk to the neighbors to get further confirmation of this. With each passing year, and especially after the year we’ve had, human beings tend to be more cynical the longer we live on this planet. We’ve even convinced ourselves that cynicism is a characteristic of a mature and clever mind. But cynicism, as I’ve often said, isn’t an indication of an intelligent mind, but an indicator of an injured mind. Past hurts tend to darken future hopes.

So, to quell any cynicism you may be feeling about 2021, I thought it would be advantageous for us to look at what the bible says about anxiety and the fear of the unknown. And while it may be impossible to become impervious to worry, the Christian’s heart ought not to be filled with cynicism but faith.

READ: Matthew 6:19-34 (ESV)

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ 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!

²⁴ “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.

²⁵ “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.

Jesus presents us with two choices:

i. Godliness or Greediness (vs. 19-24)

Jesus makes a stark contrast between earthly and heavenly treasures. *Earthly treasures have an expiration date; whereas, Heavenly treasures last forever.* The things of this earth are prone to decay (moth and rust) and theft. But the things of Heaven never decay. And what thief can pull off a heist in heaven? Not a one. You see, it is for this reason that the Godly focus their attention on the eternal rewards that are to come. Whereas the greedy concentrate their attention on the temporal rewards of today. Or, as Jesus put it, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Whatever you prize in this life will direct your actions. If you treasure this world, your efforts will show it. If you adore the Kingdom, your actions will show it. Or, as Calvin put it, “If honor is rated the highest good, then ambition must take complete charge of a man; if money, then forthwith greed takes over the kingdom; if pleasure, then men will certainly degenerate into sheer self-indulgence.”¹

Jesus uses two illustrations to explain what he means.

¹ Carson, D.A., *Mathew & Mark*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Vol. 9, Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, General Editors, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2010), p. 212.

a. The Lamp

READ: Matthew 6:22-23

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ 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!

The ancient world thought of the eyes as emanators of light rather than receptors of light.² Jesus’ point is that to focus on the things you do not have tends only toward darkness. Should you direct your attention on the things of the Lord, your eyes act like a lamp, directing your feet on a light-filled path.³ But if your eyes are acting like a broken lamp, showing you only darkness, you will only see the things that you want rather than what the Lord has already given you. To put it another way, materialism blinds the lamp-user; whereas, generosity gives sight to the lamp-user.⁴ If you only take you will never see, if you try to give you truly begin to see.

b. The Servant

READ: Matthew 6:24

²⁴ “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.

Jesus’ point is that a servant with a divided allegiance isn’t a proper servant at all. If we are focused on material gains, we are not serving God; instead, we would be serving “Money” personified.⁵ We are, in a sense, bad slaves to the Kingdom but good slaves to this world. If we are continually living to make this life more comfortable, we fail to live for our life in the next. Whether we are slaves of this world or servants of God, we will inevitably love one and hate the other. Or, as one commentator put it, “Those who work for possessions will end up hating God; those who work for God will end up hating possessions.”⁶

Together, both illustrations speak about the necessity of the believer to be single-minded in their devotion: to be undistracted as one illuminates their path with a lamp and to be loyal

² Turner, David L., *Matthew*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2008), p. 197.

³ France, R.T., *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2007), p. 261.

⁴ Keener, Craig S., *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1999), p. 232.

⁵ Carson (2010), p. 213.

⁶ Keener (1999), p. 233.

as a servant is with their master. The follower of God is single-minded. The follower of this world is double-minded. We mustn't allow the concerns of today or tomorrow to distract us from our kingdom's mission. We are not under employment in the Kingdom, but enslavement. We have been bought with a price, and as such, we are to live a life free from material anxiety in all its forms by focusing our attention on the Kingdom.

The cold hard logic of choosing eternal rewards over temporal returns is a point that Paul makes to his protégé Timothy.

READ: 1 Timothy 6:6-10 (ESV)

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Now, at this point, you need to understand something essential: *this is not a message against possessing wealth; it is a message against being possessed by wealth.* In fact, you need wealth to provide for your own household (cf. 1 Tim. 5:8), plan for the future (cf. Pro. 6:6-8), and God has graciously provided us with things to enjoy (cf. 1 Tim. 4:3-4; 6:17).⁷ Nowhere in scripture is there condemnation for recognizing your needs or enjoying the fruit of hard-earned labor. However, there is ample condemnation for trying to meet your needs apart from God and to live of life devoted to your greed. Alone, Jesus promises to fill our needs, but He is not promising to fulfill our greed. In fact, a need is far more easily satisfied than our greed. God has more than provided for our necessities, but even He cannot fill the belly of the gluttonous (cf. Pro. 13:25; Mat. 6:11).

This why I believe the greatest threat to western Christianity is not Islamism, Marxism, or Liberalism but materialism.⁸ Church, we love our material comforts far too much, and this draws us away from God. Materialism bends us toward greediness rather than godliness. And it is high-time we wake up to the idolatry of wealth within our own pulpits and pews. It has never been about how much we can get for ourselves but how much we can give to God and others. We are to live faithful lives in pursuit of Kingdom goals, not earthly gains. We are not misers pinching pennies to fill our coffers. We are not materialists consuming our resources trying to

⁷ Carson, D.A. (2010), p. 211.

⁸ Keener (1999), p. 234.

satiate our greed. We are stewards who provide for our own needs and the needs of those less fortunate than ourselves (cf. Gen. 1:28; Mat. 25:14-30; Lu. 16:1-13; 1 Pet. 4:10; 1 Cor. 4:1-2).

ii. Kingdom Serenity or Earthly Anxiety (vs. 25-34)

Jesus makes a subtle transition from speaking about greed to then speaking about anxiety. In doing so, He very clearly connects the two. A strong desire for material gains only invites anxiety into one's life. It comes to live in our homes as an honored guest and brings with it fear over the loss of one's possessions. A solitary concern for temporal things is an investment in a worrisome life.

What's more, this is an anxiety that comes about by failing to note the Father's care for his children.⁹ Should we ever feel anxious or nervous about the necessities of life, we have forgotten who our God is.

READ: Matthew 7:7-11 (ESV)

⁷ "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ 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!

He is a good Father who knows how to give good gifts. If we lack anything, we have either failed to ask God, or God has deemed it better for us not to have those things. Prayer is not a magical command to get what you want. It is a method for learning what God wants. The moment you realize your wants are secondary to God's will is the moment your life changes forever.

In fact, to help us see the pointlessness of asking only for our wants, Jesus poses a rhetorical question in our passage about the nature of life itself. He says, "Isn't life more than food and clothing?" The Implication being that life is sustained by more than just food and clothing. For instance, we need oxygen, gravity, and we need the Sun to warm our planet. His point is that many people worry about food and clothing but not these other things. If you were genuinely going to worry about the necessities for life to exist, you'd have a long unending list of things to worry about. But life is more than those things. To have things be the believer's primary

⁹ Turner (2008), p. 198.

concern, or to want only the items you want and not God's will, shows that that particular believer has fallen prey to materialism.¹⁰

To illustrate his point, Jesus asks three rhetorical questions.

a. Birds of the Air

READ: Matthew 6:26

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?

Now, this is not an encouragement for laziness. In fact, birds do work or, as it were, hunt for their food; they just don't worry.¹¹ Jesus' point is that though God provides the food for the hunting bird, he does not drop it in their beaks.¹² Just as birds do not worry about where their food will come from, the Christian should not worry about where their next meal will come from. Why? Because if God cares for birds which are of little value, how much more will He care for us—His image-bearers—who are considerably more valuable?

b. Length of Life

READ: Matthew 6:27

²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

Unlike the other two rhetorical questions in this segment, Jesus felt the answer to this rhetorical question was so obvious that it didn't need an explanation. He just poses the question and then moves on. Does worrying about your life make your life longer? No. Of course it doesn't. In fact, there have been many studies that have found that fear, worry, and anxiety can considerably shorten your lifespan.¹³ Doctors and researchers at the *American Academy of Sleep Medicine* have known for ages that stress raises our risk of diabetes, hypertension, cancer, heart disease, allergies, and susceptibility to colds and flu; due, in no small part, because worrying causes us to lose sleep.¹⁴ Even a decrease from eight to only six hours of sleep on a regular basis makes us 4.5 percent

¹⁰ France (2007), p. 268.

¹¹ Carson (2010), p. 215-216.

¹² France (2007), p. 268.

¹³ Keener (1999), p. 237.

¹⁴ General Editors, "Sleep deprivation effect on the immune system mirrors physical stress," June 30, 2012, *The American Academy of Sleep Medicine*, <https://aasm.org/sleep-deprivation-effect-on-the-immune-system-mirrors-physical-stress/>, [accessed, December 27, 2020].

greater risk of having a stroke.¹⁵ “Our life span, no less than our food and clothing, is a gift of God, and is outside human control. Worry about it changes nothing.”¹⁶

c. Flowers of the Field

READ: Matthew 6:28-30

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?

Just as the flowers do not fret over their appearance, so the Christian should not fret over the clothes they will wear. King Solomon, with all his riches and effort, never surpassed the beauty of the common wildflower.¹⁷ And if they are so clothed with splendor and excellence, even though they only last for a short while, in this case, burned for fuel, then how much more will God clothe and provide for the necessities of His children? “If God has given us life and a body, both admittedly more important than food and clothing, will he not also give us the latter?”¹⁸

Jesus point here with the birds, lifespan, and flower is very same point the Psalmist makes.

READ: Psalm 104:24-30 (ESV)

²⁴ How many are your works, Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. ²⁵ There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number—living things both large and small. ²⁶ There the ships go to and fro, and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.

²⁷ All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. ²⁸ When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. ²⁹ When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. ³⁰ When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.

¹⁵ Haiken, Melanie, “How Stress And Sleep Loss Are Shortening Your Life,” July 5, 2012, *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/melaniehaiken/2012/07/05/how-stress-and-sleep-loss-are-shortening-your-life/?sh=44a4939a5935>, [accessed, December 27, 2020].

¹⁶ France (2007), p. 269.

¹⁷ Keener (1999), p. 236.

¹⁸ Carson (2010), p. 214.

Now, to conclude his discussion on anxiety, Jesus says,

READ: Matthew 6:31-34

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.

Jesus’ point is that if you cannot serve God and money, then neither should you be anxious about the things money can buy (i.e., food, clothing, etc.).¹⁹ “Health matters more than wealth, as the body matters more than clothing.”²⁰ There is no sense in desiring things that do not matter to the detriment of things that do. Kingdom living is caring about what the King cares about. Meaning, just as greed is incompatible with Christianity, so is anxiety incompatible with the Christian life. Worry is the antithesis of faith.²¹ You may believe intellectually that God will provide, but your worry proves there is still a part of you that is faithless (cf. Mar. 9:23-24). Or, as one commentator put it, “Worry is practical atheism...”²² “The root of anxiety is unbelief.”²³

Jesus even says that the true lunacy of worry is that it causes us to fret over tomorrow’s concerns when you have enough to fret over today. Jesus says, “Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” Strip away all the theological implications about worrying, and, practically speaking, it still makes no sense. Why would we add to our already heavy burden today by adding the heavy loads of tomorrow as well? Jesus even personifies “Tomorrow” in this statement and tells us to let him worry about himself as if he were some hopeless cause not worthy of the attention we would’ve given him.²⁴ Today has so much to occupy our attention that to add Tomorrow’s concerns—concerns that may never come to pass anyways—is simply irrational.²⁵

What’s more, at the heart of this passage lies a peculiar paradox. The greedy live their lives for money, but they never have enough, whereas the faithful live their lives for God and always have enough. Or, as Jesus put it, “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” The Gentiles live for themselves and are never be satisfied.

¹⁹ Turner (2008), p. 198.

²⁰ Keener (1999), p. 236.

²¹ France (2007), p. 270.

²² Turner (2008), p. 200.

²³ Carson (2010), p. 216.

²⁴ Keener (1999), p. 238.

²⁵ Carson (2010), p. 217.

But members of the Kingdom live for God and are always satisfied. Even in the model prayer, the first petition is about seeking the Kingdom's rule on this planet (cf. Mat. 6:10).²⁶ In doing so, your basic necessities will be met.

How can this be?

Because the Christian loves God and knows that money cannot buy all the things they need to truly live. They know that it is the Lord who sustains life, and there is no sense in worrying over what is out of their control. Jesus' point is that greed comes with anxiety because money gives people a false sense of security. They think the more they have, the more secure they are. But how foolish to put your trust in something that you cannot take with you when you die.

However, to serve the Lord is to be totally and utterly focused on the things of the Lord. And the Lord takes care of His own. He will not allow faithful servants to be naked and destitute of food. Or, as the Psalmist put it, "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread."

What's more, unlike money, a relationship with the Lord is something you can take with you when you die. This is the point that Jesus was making in the Parable of the Rich Fool.

READ: Luke 12:15-21 (ESV)

¹⁵ And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" ²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

So, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

A fixation on heavenly fortunes alleviates earthly burdens.

The point that Jesus was making with these two choices is that godliness leads to kingdom serenity, just as greediness leads to worldly anxiety. You see, greed, excess, and avarice are just as incompatible with Christianity as anxiety, worry, and doubt. The Christian is not greedy. The Christian is not anxious. Should the Christian find they are either of these, it indicates a lack of faith. Jesus says our heavenly Father knows we need things like food and clothing to survive. In fact, Jesus Christ promises that the one who seeks the Kingdom first will have all that they need. He tells the Christian not to value possessions enough to seek them and not to value possessions enough to worry about them.²⁷ Instead, Jesus Christ wants us to value the Kingdom and trust that the Kingdom will provide for their needs.

READ: Psalm 127:1-2 (ESV)

¹ Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. ² It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.

READ: Hebrews 13:5 (ESV)

⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

READ: 1 Peter 5:7 (ESV)

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

So, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

A fixation on heavenly fortunes alleviates earthly burdens.

²⁷ Keener (1999), p. 228.

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Standalone Teaching | “Faith In The Midst Of A Worrisome World”

Text: Matthew 6:19-34

To quell any cynicism you may be feeling about 2021, I thought it would be advantageous for us to look at what the bible says about anxiety and the fear of the unknown. And while it may be impossible to become impervious to worry, the Christian’s heart ought not to be filled with cynicism but faith.

Pastor’s manuscript can be found here: