
Serving Two Masters

Matthew 6:19-34

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Jesus begins His ministry by word and deed. He proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom. He worked miracles in the power of the kingdom of heaven. He sat down on the side of a mountain as the new Lawgiver. He gathered his disciples near and the crowd within earshot. With authority He gives the Law of Christ. He teaches the character and conduct of those who are true followers of Jesus, who are truly in the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is radical. It still challenges us today after all these years. It is a down-side-up kingdom. It is a kingdom whose king is God who has all power and all authority. It is a kingdom whose subjects are poor, meek, humble, and persecuted. The kingdom is filled with followers who are not bound by the Old Testament. They are free to live a higher life, a deeper spirituality. They are to be distinct and different from the world.

All through the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has challenged us. What we take up today is familiar to us. Most have heard pieces of these paragraphs. But we are not true disciples of Jesus just because we have heard them or even know them. It is when we are being so challenged by these that our lives are being transformed into the kind of followers who treasure and trust God, who are not torn between two masters.

Your Struggle with Money (v.19-24)

Money is an important aspect of life and no less, the Christian life. Discipleship needs the teaching and testing that Jesus gives us here. How do you struggle with money? With materialism? With getting it, spending it and saving it?

With what you value (v.19-21)

What is the problem with your treasures?

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.

In the kingdom of heaven, our true treasures are not on earth. We are not to invest our lives to pile up here and now. What is important to us, what we value, and treasure should be saved forward, invested in heaven's interests, heaven's agendas, what God in heaven treasures. But too many Christians do have their treasures here. We usually think of material things, but it can be kids, jobs, families or even food and clothing. It does not have to be the extravagances of life; it can easily be the essentials of life.

How do you know where your treasure is? Where is your heart? It will go after your treasure. Whatever you most closely guard, defend, spend time in and with... these are likely to be your treasures. This is very, very challenging in a Christian culture that has become child centered and comfort craving.

*Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
Thou mine Inheritance, now and always:
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of Heaven, my Treasure Thou art.*

("Be Thou my Vision", M.Byrne).

That old hymn quite naturally leads us into Jesus' next words...

With what you focus on (v.22-23)

What is wrong with your eyes?

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!

We usually think of the eye as manifesting what is going on in the heart. We can see a person's soul through their eyes. But Jesus does something quite different with the eye. The state of the eyes will control the state of the soul. If the eyes let in light, the soul will be full of light. If the eyes are bad, then the soul will be dark. There is no greater darkness in the soul than to think there is light in the soul when there is not.

Now, what is Jesus talking about? Is this an observation about eyesight and cataracts? While the metaphor is true, it is a metaphor. Jesus is telling us that what we focus on will have a deep affect on our souls. It is cycle. Our heart determines what our eyes are fixed on. What our eyes are fixed on contributes to the state of our soul. This is particularly true of our money. As a treasure of our heart, if we have a worldly focus on our money and what it can purchase, then our heart will be darkened.

Michael Green is helpful when he notes, "...it is not without significance that the words good (literally 'single') and bad often have a financial nuance in the Greek language. 'Single' means generous, open-hearted, warm. 'Bad' means miserly, [close-fisted]. So, it would seem that Jesus is developing his theme about money. Not only is it important to have your treasure in the right place; it is also vital to approach life with a generous, warm appraisal of other people. There are few things so distorting as an ungenerous, mean, and critical spirit." (Green, p.103)

With what you Serve (v.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 points us to an impossibility not to an imperative. Too often this is viewed as what we must not do. That is true. But Jesus is showing us the effect of a follower of Jesus trying to serve two masters. Ultimately it will fail. You cannot be the devoted follower of two kings. You can try. Many attempt it. But at the end of day, you will be devoted to one and not the other.

Who are the two masters? God and mammon. It is unhelpful to simply translate the word here as money. The old English word, Mammon, is a larger word, has a larger universe of meaning and application. The Greek word itself was one of the names of the Greek god of wealth. It was not just about having money. It was about being devoted to all that money could purchase for you. We might use the word, *materialism*.

There is a trajectory of the heart indicated here. To try to serve two masters may begin with a devotion to both. But it is not sustainable. Eventually, one will be loved and the other hated. Jesus is not talking about emotions. He is talking about a relational commitment to that controls you. This is why the word, "devoted to." It is a form of worship. Either Jesus is your king or materialism, money is your king. Either you worship Jesus or your worship money.

Which is it?

Your Struggle with Worry (v.25-32)

Money and worry are very closely connected. Often, the more money people have, the more they worry about how to keep it, how to grow it, and keep others from wasting it or stealing it. Worldly people are preoccupied with their lives and bodies. Jesus illustrates with three examples: food, drink and clothes. True disciples should stand out in sharp contrast. We should not be like them. We should not be consumed anxious care, over these things. (from Green, p.104)

Yet, sadly, worry and anxiety over these things consumes many, many Christians. We do a lot of counseling where people are struggling with fear, anxiety and worry. Jesus addresses this in disciples simply because it is so common among us.

What causes worry? Not the things we worry over - notice the repetition of worrisome things - but the heart that thinks and wants a certain way.

Do not Worry about Today (v.25)

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life..."

This section opens and closes with a command not to worry. A command? Really? Does that mean that worry is a sin? Does that mean I can control worry? Isn't worry something that happens to me? Aren't my panic attacks and extreme anxieties something wrong in my brain? How can Jesus command what only a pill - chemicals - can fix?

This is not only a command, but an emphatic one at that. "I tell you, do not be anxious..." So the kingdom of heaven should not be dominated by worried, anxious, fearful people. But Jesus' command is an object of worry. Don't be anxious

about your life... Jesus goes on to define what that means, what that encompasses. It is quite surprising. What follows challenges us to think: if we are not to worry about the essentials of life, then how much more are not to be anxious about the rest.

Understand the Heart of your Worry (v.25-32)

"Worry is practical atheism..." (R.H. Mounce, cited in Green, p.104) Jesus goes after our worry with penetrating questions because worry is a result of our own questioning, our own doubting.

Doubt God's Care for Us (v.25-26)

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?"

You worry over the basics of life when you doubt that God values you and cares for you. Worry is a symptom of questioning God's care for you. Now look, don't get caught up in some kind of phony self-esteem scheme. God's care of you is not because you are so good, important, work hard, self-reliant. God's care for you has nothing to do with you self-image or your industry. These are lies that you believe. When you believe them, you will doubt the desire of God to take care of you.

Just look at the birds. They are taken care of by God. Your worry doubts that God loves you and cares for you more than birds.

Doubt the Uselessness of Worry (v.27)

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

The Lord tells us that worry accomplishes nothing positive. Worry is useless. We cannot change anything by it. We are going to die at the time and in the manner ordained by God. No amount of worry about health, food you eat, clothes you wear, how much sleep you get, working out at the gym has any affect on you longevity. Worry will not bring you food. Worry will not buy you clothes. Worry will not lengthen your life. Worry will not save your children. Worry will not improve your job. All worry does is disobey God and break our fellowship with Him.

Do not doubt what God says about the uselessness of worry.

Doubt God's Provision for Us (v.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?

Worry is also a problem arising from not believing God, being of "little faith." We doubt God's provision for us. We worry about our clothes, our appearance, the way others see us. We don't believe that God will take care of us. We think that all our own effort produces what, in fact, God provides. We don't trust Him.

Understand the Solution to your Worry (v.31-33)

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.

Here is the conclusion. Do not be anxious in the large picture of your life and in your particular words. Understand that your worries are connected to what you seek, what you pursue. We tend to be anxious over the things toward which we are aiming our life in ways that are too earthly, too worldly, too secular. The values of the secular world, the pressures of the culture we are living in, the influence of people all tempt us to not believe what God says and therefore to not pursue what God requires. We often are consumed with our own selfdom.

Secular people are preoccupied with the quest for food, drink and clothing. Christians are to be free of these self-centered material anxieties and instead to give themselves to the spread of God's rule and God's righteousness. (Stott, p.25)

Jesus provides the basic antidote to that over which you expend so much worry and anxiety. Believing that God knows, cares and will provide for you, pursue the Kingdom first. Worry is really a theological issue. And it is a kingdom issue. Stop worrying about all that fills your little kingdom and replace it with a kingdom first pursuit.

Now, stop. Think about this. Don't smile and nod and go on. Listen to what Jesus commands. "Do not worry about all this stuff." And what Jesus requires instead, "Do pursue God's kingdom first." I know there are lots of questions and wisdom discussions to flesh that out. The rest of the New Testament helps us with what pursuing God's kingdom looks like. But it is no less than being involved and invested in the commissional work of the Kingdom. To pursue the kingdom does not mean that you somehow legitimize your worldly and self-focused pursuits by slapping on some kind of spirituality paint. Nor does it mean that you ignore your God-given and Biblically defined and wisdom application responsibilities. The way you pursue the kingdom first is not over the rest of your life or instead

of the rest of your life but through it. Does pursuing, serving in, engaged with, the kingdom of God affect and influence the way you live and the decisions you make. God's kingdom is not a place you go to but how you live.

Pursue God's kingdom first while believing and trusting God to take care of you and yours.

Do not Worry about Tomorrow (v.34)

Today's worries are enough. But what about tomorrow and all the tomorrow's beyond that?

³⁴ "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Therefore... says it all. Our worries are not so much about today. Our doubts about God are usually about tomorrow. Jesus uses a bit of sarcasm here. There is enough to be anxious about today without being anxious about tomorrow. There are enough troubles today without getting all wrapped up in the troubles that are coming tomorrow.

What Jesus is saying is that worry is false prophecy. It is imagining out the future as though God does not exist or God's promises are not true. So you "say" about tomorrow to yourself and to others what you think may happen. But you do not know. You cannot know except where... God's Word actually tells you. To worry about the future is to bring its unknown troubles into today. Jesus' sarcasm here is meant to show the sinfulness and the folly of it.

But then, don't most of us worry about the future? Yes. Exactly.

Reflect and Respond

Where are your treasures? And in what practical ways does your heart chase after them?

Worry is a form of doubt. It is a lack of faith, of believing and trusting what God says.

God does not promise to provide you with everything the world pursues. The persecuted and poor saints in the world can attest to that. God does promise to sustain you in the midst of financial need.

Worry is a symptom that we are trying to serve two masters and are not pursuing God's kingdom first.

Worry is weakness. Worry is unnecessary. Worry is useless. Worry is blind. Worry is a failure to trust God. Worry is sin. Habitual worry is debilitating. Worry can enslave.

What you treasure and trust will tell you who your god is? Do you treasure and trust money and what it will buy? Or do you treasure and trust God in whose kingdom you live?

Johann Tauler tells a story that shows the attitude Jesus disciples should cultivate.

One day Tauler met a beggar. 'God give you a good day, my friend,' he said.

The beggar answered, 'I thank God I never had a bad one.'

Then Tauler said, 'God give you a happy life, my friend.'

'I thank God', said the beggar, 'that I am never unhappy.'

In amazement Tauler asked, 'What do you mean?'

'Well,' said the beggar, 'when it is fine I thank God. When it rains I thank God.

When I have plenty I thank God. When I am hungry I thank God. And, since God's will is my will, and whatever pleases him pleases me, why should I say I am unhappy when I am not?'

Tauler looked at the man in astonishment. 'Who are you?' he asked.

'I am a king,' said the beggar.

'Where, then, is your kingdom?' asked Tauler.

The beggar replied quietly, 'In my heart.'