

Matthew 6:19-34 Kingdom Priority

Introduction

“Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

That’s where we are going to end this lesson. I am calling this section of the Sermon on the Mount, “Kingdom Priority.” We have just finished with Jesus’ exhortation to make God Himself the goal of our spiritual acts of piety. Give, pray, fast so that you might see God and be seen by God. He is your reward.

The model Kingdom prayer Jesus gave us starts by affirming our special relationship with God as Father and then continues with an emphasis on God; the recognition of His name as holy; that His Kingdom would come; that His will would be done. Our love for God is our motive for praying these things. Recognizing your relationship with Him as Father goes hand in hand with your desire for the magnification of His glory and the extension of His Kingdom reign. Which, by the way, will go hand and hand with a desire to love all people. When people see His glory and yield to His rightful authority, they escape death and begin to become the wonderful people they were created to be.

God’s love for His children is reflected in the second half of the prayer. Jesus teaches us to ask God for our daily bread, to meet all our needs, to pray for forgiveness, because God wants us to experience His love. He wants us to pray for protection from temptation and spiritual attack so that we might live in His vision of righteousness, which is abundant life.

Jesus exhorts us to make our acts of devotion about God. Make God your top priority, your true reward. I’ve referred to C. S. Lewis’ wonderful insight in his essay “Weight of Glory” in our last lesson. Here’s another bit of that essay from C. S. Lewis,

Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.¹

In this lesson, Jesus is going to be talking about our desires and how our desires connect to reward, and the requirement and the difficulty of living in this truth that God is our number one priority.

As I’ve mentioned before, Jesus builds this moral vision He is giving us on a deeper, development, or understanding of the Ten Commandments. We’ve noticed how Jesus dealt explicitly with the second half of the Ten Commandments in chapter 5. We can summarize those commandments as, “Love your neighbor.” The first half of the Ten Commandments is under the surface of the teaching in chapter 6. The emphasis of integrity in our personal devotions develops our understanding of the third commandment, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” That was foundational to 6:1-18 in the lesson on Kingdom Piety. In this lesson on Kingdom Priority, Matthew 6:19-34, the first, the second, and the fourth commandments are foundational. “You shall have no other gods before me.” “You shall not make for yourself an idol.” “You shall observe the Sabbath.” Let’s start with the first two, “You shall have no other gods before me,” “You shall not make for yourself an idol.” You only gain the reward of Heaven if God *is* your true priority. No other gods. No idols. In considering whether God is our top priority, we are going to have to consider the relationship between our desires and our moral reasoning.

That’s where we start in this passage. Is God truly our priority? Do we desire Him? Jesus is going to give us three contrasts using the metaphors of treasure, light, and slavery. That is going to be Matthew 6:19-24. Then Jesus is going to tell us to live in trust (repeated bit at 04:46) as we make God our number one priority in life. That’s where Sabbath rest comes in. That’s going to be in 6:25-34.

¹ C. S. Lewis. *Weight of Glory* in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1980) 26.

I. Kingdom priority: What do you want (6:19-24)?

That's where we're starting with these three contrasts and what we really want. Matthew 6:19-24,

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²² "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, 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 that is 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 one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

Contrast #1 Treasure: The treasure you choose to invest in will affect your heart desire (19-21).

This contrast is in the first 3 verses – 19-21. Let's read it again.

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,
where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.
²⁰ "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,
where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;
²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Initial principle

In the first two verses here we get a clear, initial principle differentiating between earthly treasures and heavenly treasures. Invest your time, money, and resources in secure heavenly treasures, not in unsecure earthly treasures. Jesus gives us two poetic images to emphasize the risk of investing in earthly things. Earthly treasures are not indestructible. That's the wonderful image of moth and rust. Time deteriorates treasure. Earthly treasures are also not secure. Thieves might break in and steal earthly treasures.

We might push back. What about investing in gold and jewels? They do not rust and cannot be eaten up by pesky moths. But that is the definition of pedantic; pressing the language of metaphor unreasonably. The picture is clear. The point is striking. It meant to give us the problem. The problem of time is inevitable. Time itself is a thief. You can take nothing with you when you die. That statement is now wholly true in this metaphor. It is true of all earthly treasures. True to our savings account, our home, land, mutual funds, heirlooms, our job, our books, our reputation in the world. But taking nothing with you when you die does not apply to heavenly treasure. That's the point of the contrast. Your relationship with God. Your knowledge of His Word. Your love and experience with Him in this life. The transformation you have already begun to experience of your own character. Your humility and forgiveness. Your love for people. The way you have reflected the goodness of God in your home and community as salt and light. Your relationship with brothers and sisters in Christ. The ways you have helped build the Kingdom and spread the Kingdom of God. These are eternal things that moth and rust cannot blemish and thieves cannot get their hands on.

Investment on Earth in heavenly things is an investment in treasure that we can, in fact, take with us into the eternal Kingdom of God. Everything else will certainly be lost when we die.

As we apply these words to ourselves, Jesus expects us to still have in mind the hypocrites He addressed at the beginning of the chapter. Their focus was on earthly treasure even when they were engaged in acts intended for spiritual devotion. They sought to be noticed and admired in order to reap the rewards of wealth, promotion, the honorable place in the community - earthly treasures that do not last.

Jesus tells the ones who seek God in private, in a closed room that they will reap a heavenly, eternal reward. They come to know God. They are the ones who pray from the heart, "Hallowed be Your name. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven." They are not only actively engaged with God in their private room. They are actively engaged with God in their community.

Doing His will. Loving their neighbor. Doing their part to spread His Kingdom publicly in line with what they have prayed privately. They are storing up heavenly treasures that last. Those treasures, those rewards are not something other than loving God and loving people. God and people are the heavenly reward. The whole point about the mansion in the sky is not that we would each have our own luxury house in Heaven. It is one mansion with many rooms: the Father's house. We go there to enjoy the love, and hospitality, and presence of the Father. He is our reward, our wholeness, our satisfaction, our purpose.

The clear principle communicated here is that instead of spending our resources, time, and effort storing up for ourselves temporal treasures on Earth, we should spend our resources, time, and effort storing up eternal treasures in Heaven.

Underlying principle

That's in the first two verses. Then, in the next verse Jesus says, "for where your treasure is, there will be your heart also."

That's the unexpected part. That's an underlying principle here that we might not catch at first. The word "for" indicates that Jesus is talking about motive or reason. Why should we store up treasures in Heaven rather than treasures on Earth? We might expect something like, "For... you are going to die and lose all your earthly treasures, but will live in eternity with your heavenly treasures." That's certainly true. That would be a more direct motive or reason for storing up heavenly treasures.

I also would not have been surprised if Jesus said something like, "for the kind of treasure you invest in shows what you truly value." If you spend all your time investing in earthly treasures, then you value temporal honor, pleasure, and security. If you invest in heavenly treasure, then you value godly honor, pleasure, and security. That would fit with the rebuke earlier in this chapter to seek reward from God, not men.

But that also is not what Jesus says. Jesus says, "for... where your treasure is, there will be your heart also."

Jesus is telling us something about our desires. The heart becomes attached to that which we have determined to be of true value. The treasure you choose to invest in will, over time, have an effect on your desires. We make choices of how to invest our time, money, and resources. We choose whether we are going to spend time loving people; whether we're going to spend time every week in God's house; whether we're going to spend time engaged in worship, in His Word; whether we're going to spend time alone praying with God. We make choices of where we're using our money; whether we're using it to help build the Church; whether we're using it to care for the poor and needy. We are making choices of how we use our resources, and our skills, and our giftedness. You know, what do we do in our free time, in our extra time? How do we use the talents, and skills, and knowledge that God has given us? We make these choices based both on our reasoning and on our desires - on thinking and feeling. Over time our desires grow connected to the treasures that we have chosen to invest in. We are affected by our choice of treasure. Invest in these things, "for... where your treasure is, there will be your heart also."

I would have focused on the initial desire. Your desires determine whether you invest in earthly and heavenly treasure in the first place. Something in you motivates your pursuits. That is true. And maybe that's even more to do with your reasoning. You have determined that God is most valuable, and your heart's not yet fully there with you. Or maybe, in the flush of your initial relationship with God, then your heart's all there, but you're continuing by reason. Jesus is saying something about the value of continuing, of over time valuing the heavenly. This is the principle. Your desires will be further formed over time by your earlier decisions. The longer I build up my financial security; the advancement of my career; the vision of a relaxed retirement; my reputation in my community; and my own personal picture of God; my worldview - the more I build these things up, the more my heart is going to be connected to those things that I have prioritized.

What happens if I invest in the eternal things of Heaven: relationship with God; reflecting the glory of God in my life; loving the people of God; inviting people into His Kingdom; building the church as the community of God's children; valuing the way He reveals Himself in His Word; valuing His definitions of truth, justice, beauty? The more time and money and resources we invest in God and His Kingdom, the more our hearts will be with God and with His Word and with His Kingdom people. It does need to be genuine investment. You remember the mercenaries? Jesus is not talking about using religion to require God to reward us, either on in Heaven or on Earth. The reward is found in the genuine pursuit of God and the genuine desire to promote His glory and His Kingdom for His sake, because of our love for Him. To love people because we love Him and because He is making our heart like His.

Jesus' words provide a reality check for the devoutly religious in the community. So it might be a reality check for us. They look like they are all about storing up for themselves treasure in Heaven. They spend time at church. They give. They pray. They fast. They appear quite dutiful. Religious.

Jesus is saying that if this has truly all been about loving God, there will have been an effect on the heart. If they are just going through the motions to achieve benefit now and their own vision of what they deserve in Heaven, their hearts will not grow in love for God, and in the end they will be dissatisfied with Heaven. Their heart will not really be there. The image of Heaven they have in mind will have to do with their own idolatry. It will have little relationship to the Heaven that actually *is*.

A religious person who does not have a heart that loves God and loves people like God loves people is a person who has not genuinely invested in true heavenly treasure. A person who is growing in love for God and people, according to how God has revealed Himself in His Word, that person's desire for God is also growing. Where your true treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus has more to say about our desires.

Contrast #2 Light: The treasure you desire will affect your rational evaluation of life (22-23).

This contrast is in verses 22-23.

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body;

so then if your eye is clear, 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 that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

Again, Jesus' language here is not quite so straightforward as you might think.

Jesus does not say that the eye is the window to your soul. Light shines from outside through the eye into your soul. The next line does seem to fit well with a window metaphor, "So then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light." The eye is a window. If the eye is clear, light shines through. "If your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness." I guess a bad window would be a dirty window. Light does not come through, so the body is full of darkness.

But Jesus did not say that the eye is the window to your soul. That is a different idea. And the way it's used, it is not really about letting light in. That metaphor is about your eye revealing to other people what is going on inside of you.

In Jesus' metaphor the eye is a lamp. A lamp provides light. Think of a room at night. There is a lamp in the middle of the room. And since this is first-century Israel, the lamp is an oil-burning lamp. If the lamp is good; the oil is good; the wick is good, the room is lit well. If the lamp is bad, it puts off more oily smoke than actual light and the room remains dark.

The previous metaphor ended with a statement about your heart's desire. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. You will desire what you have invested in. This metaphor is adding something about our desires.

The eye in the metaphor *is* your desire. The eye is what you desire. Apple pie or coconut pie - which one does my eye desire? I am going for coconut pie every time. I have an eye for coconut pie. Roast

lamb or grilled fish? That's harder. I enjoy both, but I do have an eye for roast lamb. I am probably choosing roast lamb every time.

Jesus is saying something about our desires when He makes the eye out to be the lamp of the body. If our desires are good, they are like a good lamp. They provide light for the soul. If our desires are bad, they give off smokey darkness. Our desires confuse our moral reasoning. To have light, in this sense, is to have an understanding of what is good and what is desirable for the glory of God; for our health, our fulfillment, our ongoing satisfaction - to see what truly are heavenly treasures. Do our desires give us an understanding of the true good, or do our confuse our understanding of the true good?

Satan blew smoke in Eve's eye. He convinced her that the fruit was desirable - desirable enough to disobey God and take. She had a little light, the light of revelation from God that said, "Do not eat." But her desire - listening to Satan and the development of her desire in her for the apple darkened her understanding. Her rational mind was confused by her desire. So she reached out and she plucked death and corruption from the tree.

If the eye represents my internal desires and those desires influence the way that I navigate the world, then clear bright light inside of me guides me well. But smokey, oily desires inside of me leave me groping in the darkness. My own desires shine no light on what is good, and true, and beneficial for me and my relationships. I dare not follow my heart, because the desire of my heart is just as apt to desire a scorpion as it is to desire bread; just as likely to choose heroin over coconut pie; pornography over faithfulness to my wife. If my eye is bad, then how great is the darkness in me? My moral reasoning is hopelessly skewed by my faulty desires and by the corresponding darkness made up by the moral arguments of my society. These arguments sometimes cast light, but sometimes spread incredible darkness.

The problem we have in making God and His Kingdom our top priority is not as simple as choosing between earthly treasures and heavenly treasures. There is a deeper problem. I can't tell the difference between earthly treasures and heavenly treasures by going with my heart desires. I'm not that good at distinguishing between good and bad, or fleeting and eternal on my own. My desires, my motives are all tangled up.

I could discern the good clearly on my own if my eye was good and healthy, if my desires were all in line with reality. How wonderful it would be if I only ever desired desert in appropriate moderation and then my desire just automatically clicked in and I felt, "Hm! That one little piece of cheese cake was delicious! I am completely satisfied! I would love to now get up from the table and go take a nice walk." How wonderful it would be if sexual desire never aroused when looking at a beautiful woman or handsome man who is not your spouse. The pornography industry would simply die. You might as well try selling men's magazines of sexy fruit arrangements. As much as I love pineapple, there is no inordinate lust to buy a magazine full of racy tropical fruits. How wonderful if my desires were all good and healthy, clearly recognizing what is desirable in the right context and to the right degree for my benefit, for the the benefit of everyone I love and for the love of God.

But, getting back to current reality, I am poor in spirit. I have a sin nature that adds smoke to my lamp, and the Evil One is still at it, blowing additional smoke in our eyes. I have to assume that my eye is not good and healthy. I start with a bad eye. There is darkness mixed up with the good in me. And if my desires are dark, then my very desires deceive me into thinking that bad is good and good is bad. If that is the nature of the darkness in me, how great is the darkness!

What help is there in me? I need help outside of me. I need a light that comes from outside of me to aid me in my moral reasoning. I need words of truth I can trust. I also need a transformation of desire in me, so that my eye will be in the process of becoming bright and clear, that my desires will work together with my reason. Jesus knows what we need. In the conclusion of this sermon, He is going to emphasize the importance of building our house on the rock of His Word. That Word provides the light that gives our life stability. On that Word we can build everything. Not only that, but also later in

His ministry Jesus is going to promise more divine help. He is going to promise to send the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 15:26) to begin a process of transformation inside of us.

Our reason is not going to always have to be contrary to our desire. Jesus does not develop the solution of Word and Spirit here at this moment, in this sermon. He is teaching us about the problem of living for God as our number one priority. He has given us two contrasts. In the first, we were told that the treasure we choose to invest in will affect our heart desires. In this second contrast we were told that the treasure we desire will affect our rational evaluation of life. Jesus gives us one more contrast in verse 24.

Contrast #3 Slavery: The treasure you most desire is the master of your heart (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 one
and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and wealth.

The statement is structured elegantly. Jesus starts with a general reference to two masters and ends with the specific masters: God and wealth. We could fill in the blank of wealth with any idol that takes top priority in our lives. Here, Jesus is continuing with the earlier theme of treasure. In between these two frames – of two masters of God and wealth - Jesus continues chiastically with, "hate," "love," "devoted," "despise."

In my mind, I am immediately tempted to push back at Jesus' words. Again, I can serve two masters. I can have two jobs. It is not easy. It is possible. I am not going to hate one of them. I can pursue God and pursue wealth. I certainly do not have to hate or despise the one that I do not favor. I might also push back and say, "I do not love having any master." Maybe I do not hate either one, or maybe I hate both of them. Why would we think a slave would have to love his master? I don't want a master. I don't need a master.

The surprise in this contrast is the strength of the language. Jesus is forcing us to one side or the other. You have a master, like it or not. And you will not love them both. You will love one. You will not love the other.

So, what are we talking about here? We are talking about top priorities. You cannot have two top priorities. When push comes to shove, which one are you going to choose? We can push back at that idea all we want, but this is not a discussion Jesus is asking us to participate in. He is telling us something about the reality of our desires, and about the reality of what it means for God to be God. He is our creator, our King, our heavenly Father. He has authority. God makes demands. He calls us to be good according to His will. He is Master.

That's the first point here. Relationship with God is not a relationship of equals. This is not a business partnership. God calls us to choose His will. He does not change His will to meet our demands or our desires. He is kind. He is good. He is also God and He is King. Master. To be in right relationship with God is to submit to His will in all things.

So this first point is an assertion of authority. Like it or not, God is Master. The second point here is that choosing to obey God is a choice of love. Jesus rejects the idea that a power imbalance rules out love. A child can love a parent while recognizing the authority of the parent. Jesus tells us elsewhere, "if you love me, you will keep my commandments (John 14:15)." He is not a heavenly friend. He is heavenly King. Jesus even, being equal to the Father, wholeheartedly chose to submit Himself to the will of the Father and to do the will of the Father. And He does so out of perfect love for the Father. Jesus prayed in the garden before His crucifixion, "not my will, but yours be done." This is the heart of Jesus, and He told us to have the same heart. This is our prayer, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Because you're my heavenly Father, that's my desire.

So here is a third point. The choice to disobey God is a choice made out of love for something that is not God. We human beings always act out of mixed motives. We can have the desire for the good and the desire for evil in us at the same time. You can love two different women or love two different men at the same time. The point to Jesus' metaphor, however, is that you can only choose to marry one of them. And in choosing the, you are by definition rejecting the other.

To say you love your wife and sometimes choose to be with another woman is to not love your wife. When you actually act on a choice to be with another woman in a romantic way, you are choosing to despise your wife. Whenever you choose your idol over God, you are choosing to reject God. You prefer another. God is the only true highest good.

When we reject God for an idol, we are putting something that is not fully good, not true, not beautiful in the place of the source of all that is fully good and true and beautiful. And that shows us that the thing we choose is our master. I am bound by that idol, I am bound by my sinful desire for something that is dark. That choice is a rejection of God as worthy of our whole heart. God is not, in that moment, your highest priority.

When you give your life to God and enter into covenant relationship with Him, you are saying that you will have no other gods; you will not make any idols. You are choosing to find your identity in Him; your pleasure in Him and His good gifts; your purpose in Him; your security in Him.

When we seek identity, pleasure, purpose, and security in other sources, in the creation, spiritual or physical, we are giving our hearts to an idol. Now, God is not disillusioned by the weakness of our hearts. He knows that just as the standard of chapter 5, "Love your neighbor, love your enemy" is too high for us to actually meet, so also the standard of chapter 6, "Love your God with all your heart, mind and strength" is too high a standard for us to actually meet.

These three contrasts Jesus has given us should convict us of the waywardness of our hearts. We *are* attached to earthly treasures; our desires *are* sometimes dark and oily; we *do not* always choose God, but we step out on Him to fulfill elsewhere the desires of our heart.

We seek pleasure in a way not pleasing to Him. We seek control, security, comfort, meaning outside of Him. We worship sports teams, and actors, and musicians, and lovers more than Him. Other things are a greater priority. And these masters own our hearts. They control us because we love them too much to say, "yes," to God. Our hearts are given to another. And so we look down – we despise the goodness of God as not desirable. Or at least, not as desirable as these other things. We do not love consistently. Certainly not with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength - and certainly not at all times.

We were meant to be deeply convicted at the end of chapter 5: be perfect in your love for people as God is perfect in His love for people. We should be just as deeply convicted here in chapter 6. You can only love one master - God or idol. Which one do you love? Honestly. Do your choices show that you always choose God? No, they don't. We do not live up to the standard of what is meant to be good. We put ourselves at the center. We put other idols at the center. We fail to meet the standard of devotion to God.

Well, just as in chapter 5, these words are not meant to dash you against the rocks. This is not the end. It is only meant to be the end of hypocrisy. It is meant to move you to acknowledge that you are poor in spirit in your devotion to God, and from that point to begin honestly and sincerely to seek true devotion for God. It is not enough to recognize that you do not love God. The next beatitude is, to mourn. Are you truly sorry that you do not love God? Are you contrite? Do you mourn? Good. That shows a value for who God is, a sorrow that you have not shown Him to be valuable. But that, too, is not enough. Only going that far ends in guilt and depression. The next beatitude is meekness. Are you willing to humble yourself before the One you have not loved and receive His love for you? Because He *does* love you fully. Submit to His grace. Confess to Him the true nature of your heart. Accept that He has died for your sins; the sins of your heart and receive His forgiveness and grace. And know this: you do not get right and then enter into relationship with God. You enter into

relationship with God as one who is not right. And that starts a process inside of you: the rest of the beatitudes. You will begin to hunger and thirst after righteousness and to be filled in that desire. The light inside of you will become increasingly clean, and pure and you will see God. You will desire to show mercy because you know what it means to receive mercy. You will become a peacemaker, because peace has been given to you.

Jesus *is* communicating to us here the standard of true goodness. It is not only loving our neighbor. It is full devotion to God. And we're convicted we do not live up to the standard. But by His grace we are set free from the standard and that allows us to enter into the process of pursuing this Kingdom vision of righteousness. By faith and by grace we accept that God *is* the number one priority of life. And we also accept that we are in the process of learning to live by faith that God is our number one priority. We have not arrived; we are in process.

What does it look like for God to be our number one priority; to give ourselves fully into his hands? Jesus is getting ready to tell us. In this first half of the passage we have three contrasts that have challenged us to consider who is the Master of our heart. In the second half, Jesus is going to say, okay, if He's the Master, then live like this.

There is a logical progression from the contrasts in 6:19-24 and the exhortation in 25-34. This is how Carson sees that logical progression.

Because transient earthly treasures do not satisfy and do not last (6:19–21), *because* moral and spiritual vision is easily distorted and darkened (6:22f.), *because* a choice must be made between God and Money (6:24), *because* the kingdom of God demands unswerving allegiance to its values (6:19–24), *therefore* do not worry, and in particular do not worry about mere things.²

This is Matthew 6:25-34.

II. The reward of the kingdom of heaven comes from trusting God in your pursuit of him as your number one priority (6:25-34).

²⁵ “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, *as to* what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, *as to* 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, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and *yet* your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? ²⁷ “And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life? ²⁸ “And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, ²⁹ yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. ³⁰ “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith! ³¹ “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ ³² “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Having made God our number one priority in life, Jesus is telling us to trust this decision. Do not worry. Not only is knowing and reflecting God the right purpose of your life, but God is able and willing to care for you when you entrust everything to Him. The fourth commandment, regarding Sabbath rest, lies just below the surface of this exhortation. Every week, take a break from work. Intentionally communicate to God that He is the highest priority in your life. Realign yourself with Him. Trust Him. Stop striving and rest. You have made the right choice. He really is the highest priority. And he cares about you.

² D. A. Carson. *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999) 87.

Jesus' exhortation here begins with a rhetorical question that He then develops in two examples and concludes with a challenge to live by faith in God as your highest priority.

Here is the rhetorical question in verse 25.

²⁵ "For this reason I say to you,
do not be worried
(1) about your life,
as to what you will eat or what you will drink;
(2) nor for your body,
as to what you will put on.

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

Do not worry about the basics of life, food, and clothing. Is not life more than the basic care of the body? Jesus is not speaking here about treasure. He is speaking about basic necessities.

To repeat Carson's conclusion, "Because the kingdom of God demands unswerving allegiance to its values, therefore do not worry, and in particular do not worry about mere things."³

Jesus has more to say. He gives us two examples.

The first example addresses food and drink (26-27).

²⁶ "Look at the birds of the air,
that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns,
and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.
Are you not worth much more than they?"

²⁷ "And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life?"

We know the science of cause and effect. We might say that the birds feed themselves. But we also believe that God is sovereign over all things. God designed the birds and created their ecosystem in such a way that the birds are able to find the food they need, according to their kind. Do you not believe He will care for you also, according to your kind?

Jesus is not saying that true faith means we do not reap or gather into barns. He is not urging us to practice a Sabbath day every day of the week. There are two ways to practice Sabbath. We practice Sabbath as we work, trusting God in the opportunities He has given us, participating in our own provision. And there's a second way to practice Sabbath: to actually take a whole day off and to show God, "God, I trust you. You're important.

This metaphor is a move from lesser to greater. If the birds who cannot reap or gather into barns are cared for, then we who can reap and gather are provided for even more by God. We might say, "But birds sometimes starve, sometimes freeze, sometimes get eaten." Yes. But again, we are moving from lesser to greater. Jesus says, "are you not worth much more than they?" He is telling us to consider the goodness and order in God's creation and recognize that we are particularly precious to God. He does care for us. Trust Him. And when tragedy does strike, continue to trust Him. Again, lesser to greater. This life is not your end point. You believe in an eternal Kingdom.

I have a confession to make at this point. I tend to worry. I live with some anxiety most of the time. I am usually irked when people say, "Worry never fixed a thing." Or, "Worry doesn't solve tomorrow's problems, it only saps today's strength." I know they are right. It just still bugs me, especially when it is said by someone who seems to be dismissing or not even seeing the likely difficulties and pain ahead; when it seems like they're so overly optimistic that they're simply denying reality. I wonder, is that faith, or just denial? But, as one who tends toward anxiety, I come here, I read what Jesus says, and I have to pay attention. "And who of you by being worried can add a *single* hour to his life?" I have to admit that Jesus is telling me to address my worry.

³ D. A. Carson. *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999) 87.

Do I believe that I am in a relationship with the God of the universe? Do I believe that He sees me?
Do I believe that He is good? Do I believe that He is with me in hardship?

Jesus repeats His point.

The second example addresses clothing (28-30).

²⁸ “And why are you worried about clothing?

Observe how the lilies of the field grow;

they do not toil nor do they spin,

²⁹ yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

³⁰ “But if God so clothes the grass of the field,

which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace,

will He not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith!

Again, moving from lesser to greater. The lilies do not work and they are cared for. God designed them with beauty in mind. The lilies are of so much less value than we are. We miss the heart of what Jesus is saying if we over press the metaphor. Jesus is on a mountain. He is in nature. He is speaking to the soul of His listeners, look at the beauty around you. You may not interpret this as God caring for you. I tell you, God cares for you. He cares about His creation – the lilies. He cares about beauty. How much more does He care about you? God created this whole physical world as a realm for human beings to live in and to enjoy. The creation is a reflection of the Creator and a reminder of His love for us as human beings. The creation is not the goal. The creation is an environment that God designed for those who would reflect His image. How incredibly more important are we in comparison to His creation! If He took so much care with the clothing of the environment we were to live in, how much more care will He take for clothing us, the sons and daughters He made the environment for?

Jesus ends with a phrase of exasperation. “You of little faith!” Maybe He was shaking His head when He said this. Maybe He was just looking at them seriously. Maybe He was smiling. I don’t know. He is setting faith up against worry. The two are opposed. When we worry, which we will, the right response is to turn to God in prayer; to ask for help in seeing things as He sees them; to trust Him with the problems we face. Help me to trust you, God. And after turning to God in prayer, we then stand up and act based on that trust. Some level of worry, anxiety, stress is natural to our dependent condition, especially our sinful dependent condition. That initial worry is not something, I think, we need to be overly concerned about. That initial worry nudges us to pray. I do not have tricks that guarantee the anxiety will go away. Sometimes I pray and the peace of God that surpasses understanding settles my heart. Sometimes I pray and the anxiousness remains in full force. But then it is on me to act. I may not be able to choose my emotional state. I can act in a healthy way. I can pray. When possible, I can remove myself from a stressful situation. I can ask for help. I can make an effort to exercise, sleep, and eat healthy. I can do all these things, but I cannot guarantee an anxiety-free emotional state. What I can do is, act in faith. There seems to be a significant difference between the worry that saps all my strength and keeps me stuck in complaint and inaction, to the worry that I entrust to God and act on address in spite of maybe some continuous heaviness in me. When I do not have the emotion that ought to accompany faith – love, peace, joy - I can still choose to act in faith. I look forward to the full integration of my heart, mind, and soul. But for now, as I am in the process of becoming who God created me to be, I will choose faith even when I do not feel it.

I want to add that worry and anxiety affect some personalities more regularly than it does other personalities. And different kinds of anxieties affect different people and different stages of life. I have always struggled with some degree of social anxiety. I admitted that in a sermon recently in a church that I had never preached in before. Afterwards, one of the church’s greeters came up to me and assured me that, if I trusted God, He would help me become an extrovert. I smiled. He meant well. First, I am quite happy as an introvert. I believe God makes introverts and God makes extroverts. Second, not all introverts are anxious and overly timid. That’s not what it means to be an introvert. There are a lot of anxious extroverts. Third, I do believe that one day God will transform my

heart and mind so that I do not experience this social angst. Fourth, I am not counting on that issue being completed in me before Heaven. Maybe it will be. Some sins, some struggle, some weaknesses God removes. Some remain as thorns in our side to move us to faith in Him; to show our dependence. I don't know where I'm going to arrive by the end of this life. I know I am in progress. I have matured. I know I still have considerable angst. Interestingly, my angst surfaces in personal interaction. I do not experience stage fright, or not much of it. I'd rather speak in front of 1000 people than attend a party of 10 people.

If you have an anxious personality, Jesus' words are a particular faith challenge for you in a particular set of circumstances that create worry and anxiety in you. Jesus is not saying these things lightly. He sees you. He knows you. He knows this may be a lifelong process for you. And anxiety is one of those burdens sometimes too heavy to carry alone. Jesus is not telling you that you have to carry it alone. He taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven..." We are part of a family. We need people we can trust to share our burdens with, especially people who will listen to our anxieties and help us turn our eyes to God and trust God. In some cases anxiety requires expert help - therapy. Seeking help is not a failure of faith. It is a humble acknowledgement of our poverty of spirit in a particular area. Seeking help can be an act of faith, when we're saying, "Lord, I want to believe. Help me believe. Give me somebody to help me believe."

Now, coming back to the positive optimist. I have worked with a number of positive optimists. I am married to a positive optimist. I thank the Lord every day for that. I bring enough angst for the two of us. Still, in my interaction with positive optimists I have come to learn that lack of worry is not necessarily an act of faith. In fact, if you have a more optimistic personality, lack of worry might often not be a sign of faith. It comes natural to you. You don't worry. Positive optimism may be a denial of the darkness present in current reality. You're simply refusing to accept it or see it. It may be a pride of your own sense of spiritual well-being. It may be a strong confidence in your own identity, in your own ability. Positive optimism in Christian circles often looks like faith, even when it does not have anything to do with humbly submitting to God in trust. It is a blessing if you are not a worrier. But our strengths are often also our weaknesses. One thing the worrier has in their favor is that their worry can be a motivator to turn to God. The experience of worry provides a heart check to stop, and pray, and trust. If you are naturally optimistic, you need to develop some kind of check to help you consider whether your trust is in yourself and the general goodness of life, or is actually an expression of faith in God. I do think that a mature, emotionally healthy faith looks more like the positive optimist than it looks like my negative melancholy. Whichever we are, pessimist or optimist, we each have our own set of challenges in the area of dependence on God.

Jesus has a conclusion regarding faith and worry. This is in verses 31-34.

Trust God as you live committed to Him as your number one priority (31-34).

- ³¹ "Do not worry then, saying,
 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'"
- ³² "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things;
 for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.
- ³³ "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness,
 and all these things will be added to you.
- ³⁴ "So do not worry about tomorrow;
 for tomorrow will care for itself.
 Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Lack of trust in God is essentially pagan. The Gentiles eagerly seek all these things. God is not in control. God does not see me. I need to do everything I can to ensure what I want, what I need to get God or the gods on my side. But that's simply not correct. You are not to make the attainment of personal comforts the aim of your life. On the other hand, you do need the basics of life. You need food, and clothing, and shelter, and time off, and friendship, and pleasure, and beauty in your life. Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

But listen closely, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Trouble is not ignored here. But your worry is not going to help resolve the trouble. “Do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Jesus does not deny trouble. Do we have concerns about today? Yes. Do we have things we could worry about tomorrow? Yes. But don’t spend your time today extrapolating out worst case scenarios for tomorrow. Let your worry point you to God. The future has troubles enough of its own without us spending all of our energy worrying about those potentialities today. Yes, we reap and store up in barns today. We plan, and we save, and we prepare; but in faith, not in fear and worry.

Order your priorities with God at the very top and live in light of your top priority. I’ll end with an analogy from my friend Cory. He loves this analogy of filling up a jar with different sizes of rocks: from one big rock to some medium sized rocks, to a handful of pebbles, down to a bag full of sand. If you start with the smallest first, you fill the bottom of the jar with sand, then you add in pebbles, then some medium sized rocks, but now you are at the top and not all the medium sized ones will go in. And there is no way the big one fits. Its amazing to see what happens when you pour all the rocks out and start over with the big one first. It goes in. The medium ones go in. Now you are all the way to the top of the jar, but as you pour in the pebbles, they scatter into the spaces around the bigger rocks. And even though the jar now looks completely full, the sand finds its place in those small pockets around the pebbles.

You do this. “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.” God is first. Seek Him first. He is the big rock. The medium-sized rocks are determined by what He says is valuable, eternal. Seek His Kingdom and His righteousness. Pursue the vision Jesus is painting for us; the vision of loving people sincerely and loving God with integrity. “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these [other] things will be added to you.”