

Matthew 6:31-34

31 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today (NRSV).

Recently I was reading a book and the author wrote "I like Shakespeare because he has the ability to see all points of view with some sympathy." Then I thought that's the way Jesus is. He has the ability to see others with a degree of sympathy even for those that want to do harm to him. I like to preach, teach, and read the Gospels more than any other biblical genre because all about Jesus, the things he said and the things that he did.

Today's Scripture continues with the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus had condemned hypocrisy and a public display of piety and taught the people about prayer. Your prayer needs to be sincere. Do not pray with empty phrases in order to be heard and do not make a public display of prayer in order to be seen. Your devotion to God needs to be sincere. Then Jesus teaches the Lord's prayer where God is in relationship with us as a loving and caring parent in heaven and holy. It is God's will that is to be done right here on earth just like God's will is done in heaven. Thank God for your food and everything that sustains life. The same principle holds true with fasting, it is not to be done for show. Then Jesus addresses hoarding wealth. Now I think it is important to understand Jesus is not opposed to wealth; Jesus is opposed to being stingy, and hoarding wealth instead of doing good with your resources. It is not a matter of what you have, but which one you serve, because you cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and wealth. What you are to do is serve God and use wealth for the glory of God. Your treasure tells where your heart is. Then Jesus teaches the logic behind not storing up wealth. You do not have to worry about it. You do not have to worry about even the basic necessities of life because God takes care of the birds surely God will take care of you.

This brings us to today's Scripture where Jesus teaches that we do not need to worry about food, drink, or clothing, what we need is to put God first in our lives. Jesus' sermon is well thought out and organized. The focus is on the kingdom of God and the will of God. Jesus deals mainly with devotion and the treatment of others as he builds up to the Golden Rule. Jesus continues the lesson about concern for material things. I want to make sure we understand that God does not have a problem with you having material things. The problem is materialism; the problem is putting your trust in things that you own or have instead of trusting in God. There are a lot of wealthy people in the Bible. The lessons that the Bible teaches are to use wealth for God's glory. The point that Jesus makes is that God takes care of you. God takes such good care of you that you don't have to worry about it. You don't even have to worry about food, drink, or clothing. Life is more than food, clothing, and shelter. God is generous and can be trusted to provide. If God cares for the birds, God will certainly care for you. Therefore, those who put God first in their lives do not have to worry about tomorrow.

I was interviewing with the commissioning ministry. That's the committee that approves candidates for ordination. I had to take a lengthy test. One of the questions dealt with what you might be afraid of. My answer was the word *nothing*. Someone on the committee questioned that. I said "Well, it may seem like a pompous attitude but it is actually Scripture. It is a matter of how strong your belief is. I believe when I die I will go to heaven and the rest of my life is a journey to get there. I am ready for that so really I have nothing to fear. I mean, yeah, I'm afraid my wife or son will get in a car wreck or one of us will get cancer, and there are some things that are worse than death, like being a victim of fire with 3rd degree burns. I don't worry about that stuff so I'm really not afraid of anything." When you put your trust in God and God's kingdom, it is like a magnet where everything else lines up in your life because you are on a solid spiritual foundation and mistakes and the temptations that lead to mistakes are minimal. When you live a God first life material desires and unhealthy desires dissipate from your life because you do not need external gratification. You have internal and everlasting peace and happiness with a wonderful, warm and fuzzy feeling inside as you are filled with love. God gave us the best gift God has to give. Jesus gives to us the best gift we can ever receive - salvation, a spiritual well being full of peace and happiness, long term sustaining pleasure beyond anything that money can buy and it is 100% free.

Focusing on a treasure in heaven is a contrast to earth. You cannot be split between trying to serve both. The Lord needs undivided loyalty and attention. But the thing is that all of the benefit is all yours; all of the benefit goes to you. Responding to God is a wonderful thing it is what we want to do and love to do because we respond according to how we have been blessed.

Back in the Old Testament in Leviticus the whole nation of Israel knows that God freed them from slavery, led them to escape across Red Sea, and sustained them with food and water. So, when it comes to worship, the whole nation worships God. No one denied God because everyone knew from their own life experience the loving care of God. Loyalty to God was never questioned and never doubted. Oh, they complained against Moses but God proved to them that no one had to worry about food, clothing, shelter, or anything material.

The challenge that Jesus makes is to trust in God and trust in God's provisional care. This does not exempt you from working or owning property. The thing is your life is not based on these things. Your life is to be based on God and God's kingdom. Responding to God is a matter of seeking God's kingdom above all else. This is the church that Jesus built where everyone is seeking God and the kingdom of God above all else.