

# ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH

## NEW YORK CITY

### THE CHRISTIAN'S UNCLOUDED VISION

Matthew 6:24-34

Second Sunday after Pentecost, May 25, 2008

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has spoken about the spiritual character of those who would be his disciples and of the relationship they must have with God. But Christianity is not just a vertical relationship between us and God. It also has horizontal dimensions because we are material as well as spiritual creatures and live in a space-time, physical universe populated by other people. On this level how should we regard material things such as food, clothing, and money? How should we think about the future, which we view in terms of having possessions or lacking them? How should we relate to people who are different from us and do not act as we think they should act?

In today's Gospel lesson from our Lord's Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew chapter six, Jesus addresses these matters, and his point is this: What he has said about our relationship with God must govern how we think about earthly matters too. Jesus talks about wealth, worry, judging others and our constant need for prayer.

Jesus begins to explain that foundational to our choosing where we will lay up our treasures and which of the two visions we will set our eyes upon is an even more fundamental choice between two masters. An evil and grasping spirit distorts our vision of God's will for our own lives. We selfishly assume God would never lead us onto a path that would involve a diminishing of our status, position, or bank account. However, the Lord gives a different point of view: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:24-25). A selfish spirit can darken our inner lives and very little spiritual light is able to penetrate, that causes a distortion of our vision.

**The Impossibility of Serving Two Master:** Before considering Jesus' words, we need to remind ourselves that money is non-moral. There is no inherent evil in it and no inherent good. The questions of right and wrong

have to do with what we do with money. You put it to low uses or you can put to good use, bringing eternal reward and riches. Furthermore, the amount you have is not the determining factor. A day-labor person may be miserly and covetous, while a wealthy stockbroker may be generous. Now what does Jesus say? ***“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon” (Matthew 6:24).***

“Mammon” is from an Aramaic word denoting “what is stored up” (property). Hence it came to have the meaning of riches or wealth. Etymologically it may refer to anything in which one puts his trust.

Love and hate are common Semitic expressions. Jesus’ meaning is clear: you will always prefer one master over the other. Both these masters make total demands on us. Worldly things demand our entire devotion, but so does God. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5). God want our all!

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones tells of a farmer who reported happily to his wife that his best cow had given birth to twin calves, one red and one white. He said, “You know, I have been led of the Lord to dedicate one of the calves to Him. We will raise them together. Then when the time comes to sell them, we will keep the money from the one calf and give the money from the other to the Lord.”

His wife asked which one he was going to dedicate to the Lord, but he answered that there was no need to decide that now since he was going to treat both of them alike. Several months later he came into the kitchen looking very sad. When his wife asked what was troubling him he answered, “I have bad news. The Lord’s calf is dead.” “But you had not decided which was to be the Lord’s calf,” she objected. “Oh, yes” he said. “I had always determined that it was the he white one, and it is the white one that has died.”

It is always that way with us; it is always the Lord’s calf that dies. We must decide from the beginning that we are here to serve God above everything else and that everything we possess has been given to us by God and it is be held in stewardship for Him. Where is your heart? Where is mine? Is the light within us still light, or has it become darkness? And which master do we serve; God or Money?

**Do Not Worry:** Jesus has warned us about the problem of materialism in Matthew 6:24, and now in Matthew 6:25-34 He turns to another unhealthy disorder: Worry. Jesus knew that a materialistic focus lead to anxiety regardless of whether one is rich or poor. The chief reason we are so preoccupied with our possessions and with acquiring more of them is that we worry about the future and do not trust God to care for us. Why shouldn't we worry? Jesus gives three reasons, marked by a three-fold repetition of the word *therefore* or *so* (the same word in Greek) in verses 25, 31, and 34. In each case, the "therefore" points back to what came immediately before. In other words, because of the truth in verse 24, we should not worry; because of the truth in verses 26-30, we should not worry; and because of the truth in verses 32 and 33, we should not worry. Three times in this text the Lord tells us not to worry: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life" (v. 25). **(1.) You cannot serve God and worry too.** Jesus' first "therefore" picks up on the contrast between God and Money that He developed in verse 24: "You cannot serve both God and Money." To serve God you must trust God, and you are not trusting God if you are worrying. The first answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." If that is an accurate description of what life is about and what our service to God means, it is clear that we cannot either serve or glorify God while questioning His ability to take care of us. Therefore, stop worrying. "So do not worry" (v. 31). **(2.) If you are worrying, you are overlooking God's care of the rest of His creation.** You do not have to be a great theologian or even a great Bible student to see that God care for His creation; for the birds, the flowers, even the common grass of the field. But did He provide for the rest of His creation, don't you suppose He will also care for you? He will, of course. So don't worry. If you do, you are really slandering God in regard to His wisdom, knowledge, power, goodness, and providential care. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow" (v. 34). **(3.) It is only by putting God first that we can be sure of anything.** If we are created to know God and serve God, then the only ultimately successful course in life is to trust God and not worry. If God has created us and has redeemed us through the work of Jesus Christ, are we to suppose that He will fail to care for us. Therefore, make it your goal to seek God's interests first and see if your physical needs do not come to you naturally and without any concern your part. It is here that our Lord powerfully and memorably gives us His counsel regarding anxiety. It was needed then, and it is needed to day.

Said the robin to the sparrow;  
“I should really like to know  
Why these anxious human beings  
Rush about and worry so.”

Said the sparrow to the robin;  
“Friend, I think that it must be  
That they have no heavenly Father,  
Such as cares for you and me.”

There is no persecutor or antagonist has in readiness such terrible tortures as anxiety. Today people consume tranquilizers and sedatives by the tons and are running to counselors by the millions. Christ’s counsel is sorely needed, and what He says here can profit each of us. However, I do not believe Christ’s intent here is to foster in us a detached “who cares” attitude. There is a type of good worry (or perhaps I should say good concern) that all healthy Christians have. For example, Luther says we are to be anxious about the spiritual well-being of others’ and points to Paul as the example in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:28-29: “Besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?”

We are also to be concerned about the state of our hearts and the incessant temptations to sin; (Psalms 38 and 51). And there is the care and concern that is inherent in any serious work of God. We are to think, plan, and anticipate any pitfall (Luke 14:28-32). Some concern is good, but Jesus is counseling us against worry that is self-centered and has at its root a lack of trust in God. No good architect does a good job of building a bridge without sometimes waking up at night and checking his figures, the quality and his metals, and the quality of his design. A preacher might be honestly concerned about his sermon; that it be true to the text, practical, spoken in the power of the Holy Spirit and in love. Or he might simply be worried about his reputation. The first is healthy and godly, the second is not.

**Do not be Anxious Because You are Children of the Kingdom:**  
*“Therefore do not worry, saying “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” “For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for*

*tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble*” (Matthew 6:33-34). Jesus is now getting personal with His argument, do not be anxious because you are children of the Kingdom, and He will provide all you need. He tells us that if we are anxious about these things, we will be just like the secular-humanist world. “For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father know that you need them” (Matthew 6:32). The Gentiles, the secular world, seek material things because they overestimate their significance. The characteristic tendency of those without Christ is to be bound by the horizons of earth. Everything is crammed into the visible. This, in turn, promotes worry about secondary matters such as food and clothes.

How should God’s children live? Jesus gives His famous answer in verse 33: “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Seeking His kingdom primarily means trying to spread the reign of Christ through the spread of the gospel. It involves a profound poverty of spirit. Seeking His righteousness involves making His righteousness attractive in all areas of life; personal, family, and material. The Lord tells us that the one who does this is approved: “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” (Matthew 5:6). Matthew 6:33 marvelously encompasses our evangelistic and social responsibilities, which we are to carry out with fervor one day at a time. “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

“Tomorrow,” the future, will have trouble, it is unavoidable. Tomorrow will have its challenges and trials, no matter how hard you try to prevent them. We are not to worry about tomorrow. Worry will not destroy tomorrow’s trials, but it will sabotage our strength. Worrying does not enable you to escape evil. It makes you unfit to cope with it. The truth is, we always have the strength to bear the trouble when it comes. But we do not have the strength to bear worrying about it. If you add today’s troubles to tomorrow’s trouble, you give yourself an impossible burden.

Stop worrying. Anxiety is futile. Do not borrow trouble. How can we possibly do this? “Seek first” is in the present imperative, which means we are to be in a continual quest for God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness. When you and I do this, our focus is no longer on what we wear, eat, and drink, and we are thus liberated from the blight of anxiety. If we constantly seek Him, there will be no room for lesser matters. If we seek His kingdom

and His righteousness, the cares of the day will flee. Do not live in the future. Live now, and enjoy the life God has given you.

What comes from the Lord because it is impossible for humans to manufacture it? **Wisdom.** What comes from humans because it is impossible for the Lord to experience it? **Worry.** And what is it that brings wisdom and dispels worry? **Worship.**

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”