

Session 6

YOUR FIRST PRIORITY

Matthew 6:25-34

Memory Verse

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. ³⁴ Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

– MATTHEW 6:33-34, CSB

Your First Priority

THEOLOGICAL THEME: Like much of the Sermon on the Mount, this passage is about the sanctification of a believer. In these verses Jesus especially spoke to the issue of worship and idolatry.

That which is earthly will pass away, but that which is heavenly is eternal. Jesus told His disciples to lay up for themselves treasures in heaven, not treasures on earth where rust and moth destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

Charles Spurgeon said, “It is time that I am done with all butterfly-hunting!”¹ What he meant was that pursuing earthly and temporal ambition is like hunting butterflies. When a child captures a butterfly, more often than not they destroy it because, though it may be beautiful, it is frail. Earthly ambitions fair no better. People chase after careers, investments, houses, clothes, vehicles, achievements, honor, fame, and power only to find that these crumble into dust in the end.

Christians, however, look forward to something that is beyond description and far greater than anything this world has to offer. If their hope is certain and their faith true, then they dare not bow down to the idols of this world.



What are some ambitions you have for your life?



How would you describe the difference between earthly ambitions and heavenly ambitions? Would you say your ambitions are more earthly or heavenly?

Session Summary


In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed His disciples about what it meant to live as a citizen of the kingdom. He preached a message that can only make sense and be received with gladness by those who have experienced the saving grace of God in the marvelous gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our passage today can only be understood with the previous section in mind. Jesus told His listeners to store up treasures in heaven, not on earth. He told them directly that they could not serve two masters—God and money. Jesus’ teaching in verses 19-24 might be summed up as, “Don’t worship the idol of money.”

1. Consider His Word (Matt. 6:25a, 31)

Many parents have had the experience of commanding their children to put on their shoes, take their plate to the sink, or turn off the television only to be met with a counter demand for more explanation. Parents expect immediate and unquestioning obedience from their children. God expects the same from Christians. Jesus deserved the same from His disciples. But God in His mercy and grace bears with His children. He gives them more than they deserve because of His patience and mercy.

The cornerstone of Jesus’ argument against an idolatrous preoccupation with temporal needs is the authority of His Word. Jesus taught with authority throughout His ministry and did not have to appeal to someone else. This was in sharp contrast to the Pharisees and Scribes who appealed to external authorities to validate their teaching. Jesus taught on His own authority, and it amazed those who heard Him. This is a significant principle for Christians today. Every believer and local assembly must come to grips with the authority of the word of Christ in their lives.

 Why do Christians need an authoritative word in their lives? Why is Jesus’ lordship over His people a kindness and mercy toward them?

The constant refrain and summary statement in the Book of Judges is that everyone did what was right in their own eyes. When we combine radical corruption with self-rule, we end up with an irreparable disaster. Thus, the need for authority. For the fallen world, governments are a part of God's common grace toward all humanity regardless of whether or not they submit their hearts to God. For born-again believers, the reign of Christ is essential to a joyful, Spirit-filled life. The lordship of Christ is a great mercy and kindness to Christians. We cling to it, cherish it, and live by it. Milton Vincent said it this way: "According to Romans 6, when I obeyed the gospel call I was both declared righteous and 'became a slave to righteousness' at the same time. Quite literally, the righteousness that God credited to me became my master on the day I was converted! And now I am daily called by God to surrender the members of my being as slaves to do whatever this righteousness dictates."

? How does the authoritative word of Jesus in our lives relate to the worry and anxiety we so often experience?

At its root, our anxiety is almost always tied to a desire to control things in our lives. When this is our primary goal in life, we live as the Israelites by doing what is right in our own eyes. As Christians, Jesus is our King and our duty is to submit to Him in every way in all of our lives. Of course, we fail at this because we still live in a fallen world and battle against the old nature. It's for this reason that we must daily commit ourselves to submit to His lordship by submitting to His commands in Scripture. As we read, study, meditate upon and memorize the Scriptures, we will be convicted of sin and renewed in our fervency to serve our reigning King. The Holy Spirit will enable us to reject our tendency to do what seems right in our own eyes and live in humble obedience to the word of our King. This humility leads us to greater trust in Him with every area where we desire control.

? Application: How might you seek to trust in the Word of God when you face the desire to control your own life? What are some practical means of storing up truth in your heart and mind that you might be prepared for in these moments?

2. Think About Eternity (Matt. 6:25b, 32-33a)

One of the primary themes in the Bible is that there is so much more than what we can see. Christians aren't materialists. Christians believe what they can see, taste, touch, and hold is only a small sliver of what is real. Furthermore, that which can be handled isn't what they should give their attention to. Paul wrote to the Christians in Colossae, "So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:1-2).

 Why is it right and fitting for Christians to give their attention and energy to "things above" and not to "earthly things"? How is this related to common causes for worry?

 What positive command did Jesus give in verse 33? What is the essence of the command? What are Christians to do?

Jesus told His followers to seek first the kingdom of God. Let's recall that this passage was Jesus' follow-up to His teaching in verse 24, "You cannot serve both God and money." In verse 33, Jesus restated that command in this way, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." These two verses taken together help us discern what Jesus intended here:

- God is to have the highest priority in our lives.
- We are to serve God.
- We cannot serve God and something else.
- If we serve something else, then we are not seeking God's kingdom first.

The essence of this passage is worship. While it may seem on the surface to be about money, food, clothes, and worry, it is actually about the affections of the heart. Jesus called His followers to whole-hearted devotion to God. God the Father is drawing people to His Son, and those who believe are called to live in a way that is congruent with their position in Christ. Jesus' teaching had been with Israel since the beginning: "Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deut. 4:6). But now God is doing a new thing in Christ. Now He is giving them a heart to do it (Ezek. 36).

? Application: What is your heart drawn out to, things above or things on earth? Why? What can you do to cultivate a heart that is caught up in the beauty and goodness of God?

3. Reflect Upon His Work (Matt. 6:26-30,33b)

Jesus, in His mercy, gave His followers a practical means by which to combat idolatrous worry about and striving for material things.

? What promises did Jesus make about physical needs in these verses? How might you recall these promises to combat worry on a daily basis?

? What are some other means by which we might combat worry in our lives?

Jesus promised that God would provide for His people. How wonderful and gracious of our Lord to not leave us wondering what will happen. Jesus said that God would carry the burden of providing for His people.

In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul instructed the believers in Philippi to pray instead of worrying. Further, Jesus told His followers specifically to pray for daily needs in Matthew 6:11. Christians should replace worry with petition, prayer, and thanksgiving. In other words, the Christian's response should be worship instead of worry.

Praying to God for our daily bread is no fool's errand. Prayer isn't some sort of Christian meditation by which Christians inner peace by releasing their concerns into the cosmos. As Jesus pointed out, God is able and willing to care for His children in very real ways.

In prayer, Christians make requests to the one true and living God, the one "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rom. 1:8), the God who delights in His creation and for whom nothing is too hard (Jer. 32:27). We are praying to the one of whom Jesus said, "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" (Matt. 7:11).



What confidence do Christians have when taking anxieties before God in prayer? What specific anxieties do you need to bring before God in prayer?

Of course, the Christian's prayers mean nothing if the one to whom they petition is unable to meet their needs. This fear, however, is quickly laid to rest when we read the Scriptures and also when we consider God's provision in our lives up until this point.

God has promised to care for His children. Philippians 4:19 says, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." If God's word is that He will care for His own, and if God is always faithful to His word, then Christians have a double guarantee that their prayers are not in vain. This, of course, doesn't mean that God is obligated to give what His people request. He is too good of a Father for that. He won't give His children a snake even if they ask for one thinking they are asking for a fish.

God provides for His creation. But –does He provide for all of His creation? Psalm 145:8-9 says, “The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.” Matthew 5:45 testifies, “For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” In other words, God cares for all His creation, whether willingly submitted to him or not. His kindness extends to all up to a point. This is known as common grace.

Yet, God’s care for His people goes beyond common grace. Not only does He provide His children with their physical necessities, He also blesses them with His presence, His friendship, the forgiveness of sin, and eternal life.



Application: Do you trust God with your daily needs, or are you relying on yourself to provide? Are you a person of prayer, or do you have the mentality, “If it’s going to get done I’ve got to take care of it myself”? What needs to change?

Conclusion

Jesus knew this teaching was hard. He knew the question that would naturally come to their minds would be, “If I don’t take care of me, then who will?” Jesus’ aim in verses 25-34 was to comfort and encourage those who would follow Him to serve and worship God alone and to trust Him to provide for their needs. He commanded His listeners to not worry. His desire is that His followers would live a life of faith and obedience, not fear, worry, and self-reliance.

Jesus’ argument consisted of three parts. First, He commanded His followers to eschew a worrisome outlook on life. Second, He laid plain the reality that the child of God is redeemed for nobler purposes than the pursuit of earthly things that will not last. Christians have more to pursue than only a comfortable retirement. Finally, God has promised to provide for His creation and especially for His people.

? What are the areas where you most experience worry and anxiety in your life? How are you encouraged by today's study in regards to these concerns?

? How do your anxieties in life tend to impact the relationships you have with those around you? How might a great daily trust in Christ change this?

? How would living with trust in God over trust in yourself change the way you view opportunities to share the gospel with others?

CHRIST CONNECTION: The glorious gospel woos Christians away from idolatrous striving and worry because the same God who has so wonderfully cared for their souls through Christ's sacrifice will also care for their bodies.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: Jesus said, "Gentiles eagerly seek all these things." When Christians joyfully bow down to the one true and living God and forsake the worship of money, their lives become like a gleaming pearl against a backdrop of crimson. The strangeness of their lives is unmistakable and a living testimony of a life that has been transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.



FOR NEXT WEEK

Judgment and Discernment

Main Passages

- Matthew 7:1-6

Session Outline

1. A Two-Way Street (Matthew 7:1-4)
2. How Not to Be a Hypocrite (Matthew 7:5)
3. Dealing with Dogs and Hogs (Matthew 7:6)

Memorize

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. ³⁴ Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

- Matthew 6:33-34, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - Romans 14:10-12
- Tuesday - James 2:3
- Wednesday - 1 John 4:20
- Thursday - Romans 2:1-3
- Friday - 1 John 4:1
- Saturday - Romans 12:2

References

¹Spurgeon, Charles H. *Flowers from a Puritan's Garden, Distilled and Dispensed*. Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1976.