

Matthew 6:19-34: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] Matthew 6 verses 19 to 34 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. 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? 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? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.

They neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 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?

[1 : 51] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.

Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. At the end of Matthew chapter 6, Jesus continues his teaching about what it looks like to live in a way that fulfills righteousness.

Jesus' teaching here is similar to that of Solomon. What we see in Solomon is wisdom unpacking the logic of the law, seeing the deeper ways in which the principles of the law can be expressed and lived out.

He's recognizing shrewd ways that we can conform ourselves to it. Once again, Jesus recognizes that motives don't float free, but they can be moved in different ways by material situations and conditions.

[2 : 53] And there's a problem that we face. The problem is all the things that we invest in on this earth are things that can fade, things that can fail, things that can be lost, and that can be corroded or rusted or tarnished.

And this is similar to what we see in the book of Ecclesiastes, as Solomon reflects upon the fact that even if this person builds up this great wealth through wisdom, they may end up leaving it to someone who's a fool and will swander it, or bad luck can hit them, or they may find that all their wisdom comes to naught in some other way.

The alternative then is to invest your resources in something that will last, something that will endure, and those are spiritual treasures. The other thing that he notices here, that he highlights in his teaching, is that the heart will tend to follow your resources.

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. And there's a logic to that statement that isn't merely condemning the building up of treasures on earth. It's also calling us to invest our resources in things that will last, in the things of heaven.

The point that Jesus is making is, do you want your heart to be set upon the things of heaven? Well, invest your resources, invest your money in the things of heaven.

[4 : 11] This is similar to some of the things that Jesus has been teaching earlier in this chapter. Do you want to care about what God thinks over what your neighbour thinks and what the crowd thinks? Well then make sure to perform your prayer in a secret place where only God can see, and not in front of the audience of your neighbour.

You will perform to whatever audience you have, and so perform to an audience that is of God alone, and then you will find that that is the audience that you set your heart upon conforming to and pleasing.

Put your money where you want your heart to be, and where it is not vulnerable to loss, and where it won't place your heart in the same jeopardy of loss. Jesus has already used the imagery of the lamp to describe his disciples.

And now he uses it to describe the eye. We can speak about things like the apple of our eyes, the thing that we are focused upon, or cherish above all else. The eye orients the body, it turns the head, which moves the entire body in turn.

If your eye is set upon the light, then your entire body will be affected by that. However, if your eye is set upon that which is evil, it will be very different. And in Matthew there seems to be a particular meaning that has a bit more of an idiomatic flavour, and it's concerned particularly with generosity.

[5 : 30] In Matthew chapter 20 verse 15 we encounter this expression again, where the master says to the labourers in the vineyard, The contrast between the good and the bad eye might be the contrast between a generous person, who looks out and sees people to whom to give, and the envious person, who turns green when they see anything that they want, that the other possesses.

Now, that is a way in which we deal with the sins connected with money. Do we have a good eye? Do we have an eye that's fixated upon helping other people?

Or are we people that are focused on what we can gain for ourselves, and what we envy of our neighbours? Jesus continues to teach about the dangers of money. Mammon, or money, can become a master.

Our powers place us under their power very easily, without us realising what's going on. Our liberties can take liberties with us. Our technologies can render us subject to them.

We think that the economy makes us rich, but we can often find ourselves enslaved to its continual growth. It preoccupies our attention, we become fixated upon it.

[6 : 51] We can think about similar things with new technologies, which promise to make us free and give us all these new powers, and yet we find ourselves enslaved to our devices. We're not actually freed by them, they take us away from things that are good.

And so, in the same way, money can become a master over us if we're not careful. There is a danger of focusing upon ideas and motivations, and not being sufficiently attentive to things.

Money itself, not just our motives concerning money, but money itself is a dangerous trap, and we need to be very wary of how we relate to it. Treated shrewdly, it can be good.

Treated foolishly, it can entangle us in all sorts of evil and bondage. Like Solomon, Jesus draws attention to the creatures and God's concern with and provision for them.

Once again, the issue is our attitude to material possessions and provisions. We are to adopt a posture of dependency upon God for our daily needs. Worry is far more likely to diminish our life than to extend or fill it.

[7 : 58] There is relief to be found in a reminder of the limits of our power. This isn't a denial of the value of prudence and provision for ourselves, but it's a spiritual posture to be adopted, with anxiety being the alternative.

And there's a connection with the prayer for daily bread here, the contrast between worry and faith. Jesus will return to some of these themes in the parable of the sower, where the concerns of this age and the worries of this age can choke the seed, the deceit of wealth.

All of these things are obstacles for our pursuit of the kingdom. What is our priority? It should be the seeking of the kingdom and God's righteousness.

Everything else must be secondary. The kingdom alone is where we will ultimately find security. A question to consider. Where in this section is Jesus picking up themes from the book of Ecclesiastes?

Look back at the book of Ecclesiastes and see some of the parallels between its teaching and Jesus' teaching here.

