

# GOD AND MONEY

Part 3- When the World Cries "Worry!", Don't

TEXT: MATTHEW 6:25-34 (ESV)



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## WHY MONEY?

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "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." (Matt 6:24)

Since both God and Money are very real and since both have the capacity to structure the way we live, relate to others and assess the future, both can become objects of our worship. Jesus says we cannot worship both.

Today's sermon deals with the topic of money—specifically worrying over money. I want to be careful. I don't want to be cagey here, leaving us with a vague impression that I was trying to drop some kind of hint or manipulate this congregation into doing something I was too afraid to come right out and ask. So let me give you two motives that are NOT driving this message, and then three reasons for this sermon on money today.

**1. I'm not preaching this sermon because Oak Hills' leaders are panicking over the church's finances.** They are not. Oak Hills' Finance Committee will be sending you a report for the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of '09, and you'll see what we've seen all year at Oak Hills, and what most have seen in our workplaces and homes—everything is down. The Finance Committee is committed to Oak Hills operating within our means. As they are already well into the budget process for 2010, they're taking steps to ensure that. Any questions you might have about this year's financial picture or 2010, the Finance Committee would love to address.

We are blessed to have men serving on this committee who are very knowledgeable about both finances and the Gospel. As I have met with members of that committee, and as I have had the honor of sitting at the table with Oak Hills' elders and deacons, I can tell you each of these individuals approach Oak Hills' finances seriously and prayerfully, but not fearfully.

**2. I am not preaching this sermon in an attempt to address a problem with giving in the church.** To address a problem with your giving, I'd need knowledge of your giving. I don't have that. Your elders and deacons have no specific knowledge of who gives what. We look at weekly giving totals, but not at who those funds came from. Jesus says, "When you give, don't let your left hand know what your right is doing, that your giving may be in secret. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Mt 6:3-4) Since your giving is to be known only to God, only those essential to the book-keeping process see the individual tithes and offerings coming in. Your giving is between you and God. Our job is not to determine what you give, but to teach the word of God, that your giving might be informed and directed by Scripture.

**So why am I preaching this sermon?** 1. Jesus talks about money more than most any other topic in Scripture—not out of concern for people's personal portfolios, but because our thoughts, feelings and actions concerning money reveal so much about where our personal and eternal securities lie. 2. In light of that, as your pastor I do not believe I've addressed this topic as consistently as I should. 3. Given our country's economic state, countless voices are weighing in on what we should think and how we should act regarding money. Many are saying, directly or indirectly, that we should worry. At Oak Hills, we revere Scripture over all other voices, and so we must go to God's Word which tells us when the world cries "Worry!", don't.

If you wanted to boil down Jesus' teaching on money, here's where I'd take you "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth & rust destroy & thieves break in & steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matt 6:19-21) Money isn't inherently evil: the love of money is. Having lots of money isn't inherently evil; accumulating wealth in an effort to make this world your primary kingdom is. Regarding money as a means of provision for good things isn't evil; regarding money as your provider is.

For many, we dismiss much of what Jesus has to say about money on the grounds that we don't believe we'll ever have an abundance of wealth. Most of us aren't rich young rulers or deceitfully prosperous but short tax-collectors. We're just us, scratching out a living, working hard, doing what we can. But in today's text, Jesus catches us just as we're trying to slip out the back of this conversation. To those maybe not flush with cash but overflowing with worry about it, God has something to say.

## MATTHEW 6:25-34

<sup>25</sup>"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you'll 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? <sup>26</sup>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? <sup>27</sup>And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>28</sup>And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup>yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup>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?

<sup>31</sup>Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup>For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. <sup>33</sup>But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. <sup>34</sup>"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

## WHAT, ME? WORRY?

This text begins with “Therefore” prompting us to ask, “What is it there for?” The previous verse says, “No one can serve two masters. He will hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Mt 6:24) Notice the power Jesus ascribes to money if we make it our master. It will make us **hate** God. Think about that. Have you ever raised your fist to God over money—an unexpected debt, lack of funds or maybe theft. Have you considered maybe you are feeling allegiance to the tyrannical rule of wealth—and you are angry because God won’t comply with money’s demands?

In this text, Jesus commands us to trust God to provide on the grounds that He cares for the birds and flowers, and we are much more precious to Him than those. This can be hard, especially when we recognize Jesus isn’t talking about God providing luxuries here, but food, shelter and clothing—basic essentials. These are what we are to trust God for. And if these, everything else too. Worrying will fail us for two reasons.

**WORRY IS FOOLISH**—Behind our tendency to worry lies a belief, no matter how well thought through, that we *should* be able to control what happens in life. Jesus asks the rhetorical question, what can you add to life by worrying? The question is brilliant for revealing worry’s inability to change anything, but also in the folly it reveals in our hopes that feeling this feeling and acting in response to that feeling can somehow bring external change. You cannot add a minute to your life by worrying, nor can you worry provisions into existence. One commentator said worry “accomplishes nothing except to put God out of the picture.” (Davis ICC)

**WORRY IS IDOLATROUS**—Beneath the simple folly of worry lies a much deeper evil. Worry can indicate allegiance to a false god by revealing a commitment to personal worldly security running so deep that it rules your emotional and spiritual life. Scripture doesn’t promise security in this world. Many verses indicate the opposite. (Mt 5:11-12. cf. 1 Jn 3:13) Dan Doriani said of our text about God’s provision; “Jesus’ analogy promises God’s care, not a carefree life.” (Matt Com, 264) The true nature of idolatry isn’t so much the worship of a “little g” god like Zeus. True idolatry is the worship of self in the place of God. Adam and Eve ate the fruit on the promise that it would make them more like God.

The pursuit of a carefree life, when we are not promised this, but rather God’s care, can be a strong indicator that we are rebelling against His Lordship over us. Instead of living to serve Him, we want Him to serve us—and this is the heartbeat of idolatry. But the whole basis of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is that believers are not citizens of this world. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God. To Jesus this is *NOT* a metaphor. Our citizenship isn’t with this world. It really is with God in Christ. It’s not like the sticker my kindergartener got on her fieldtrip to the fire station—“Jr. Firefighter.” Our citizenship in God’s Kingdom beats any passport you’ve ever held, guarantees more rights and delivers more security than this world ever can.

**A BRIEF WORD ON EMOTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY**—There is an aspect to Jesus’ command we mustn’t miss. If Jesus commands us not to worry, He is telling us to refuse to nurture an emotion. Taken with Eph 4:26, “Be angry and do not sin,” we must conclude we are accountable before God if not for our emotions, then at the very least for how we act on them. There is so much more to look at concerning a Biblical view of our emotional life, but I wanted to plant this seed in your minds in this exploration of money and worry that we are accountable before God for how we nurture and yield to our emotions.

## SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM

Worry comes easy. So what are our alternatives? This isn’t Jesus telling the uptight to relax. Jesus prohibition against worry isn’t freedom to embrace sloth or carelessness. Birds are not lazy. They work. Flowers develop too. The point is, like the flowers or the birds, we are to live as God created us—which includes a call to work, relate, serve, think and take responsibility for our actions before God. For some, Jesus’ call to abandon worry is a call to significant changes in how we approach our finances or work. Some of us may need to downsize our homes or sell a car or tend to any other financial situation we’re upside-down on in order to live within the means the Lord has provided.

Worry is seeking security in the things of this world. We’re not to seek our security there. So where are we to seek our security? “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” And what does it mean to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness? Three points:

1. **Regard God as your King and live as His servant**—Love Him, yield to His commands and seek to know His word which lays out for us the principles of godly living. God has given us His word, rich and deep in wisdom for every arena of life—money, family, marriage, work, friendship, worship, ethics, politics and humility, just to name a few. Imagine the worries we’d avoid if we yielded to God’s wisdom.
2. **Pray for and Proclaim His Kingdom**—If your passion is to live as a citizen of God’s Kingdom first, so many of the worry-inducing situations in this life will be instantly minimized. You won’t care about what your neighbors think of the car in your driveway or your position at work. Quite the opposite, you’ll want your neighbor to know the peace of God.
3. **Work, Earn and Invest in ways that glorify your King and Build His Kingdom**—Money can be a great tool for social reform here and abroad. Plan for every stage of your financial world to, in some way, proclaim and bring glory to God. Then your money will be a means to an end, not the end itself.

## ONLY EVER ONE PROVIDER

Jesus goes on to describe the godless life fraught with worry. “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” (Mt 6:31) are questions that never go away because to the godless, they have no definite answer. They are all really asking, “Who will provide?” Jesus says, “the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.” (Mt 6:32) You have a provider. And you’ve only ever had One—God.

Your spouse, your work, your inheritance, your lottery ticket, your children’s success, your own ambition and industry—these have never been your provider. God alone takes care of you. You may be wondering when He’ll come through for you. Beloved, has He not already? Consider what He has given—His Word to guide, correct and encourage you; His Son Jesus, who paid the penalty of your sin in full offering Himself on the cross; and His Holy Spirit to live in those who believe, empowering us to live as His followers by His grace and for His glory.

Where are you seeking personal security? Are you desperate for help? Seek first His Kingdom and God’s righteousness, and everything else—food, shelter, clothing—will come. He gives birds what they need and He loves you more. He adorns the flowers, but you’re more beautiful to Him. When the world cries “Worry!”, **don’t**. Why? Because all you have needed His hand hath provided. Great is His faithfulness. Trust Him.