

COMMENTARY ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Matthew 6:25-30

We're in the world. And we're for it. But we're not *of* it. We don't march to it's beat. We march to a beat that transcends this city and its culture, this world and its ways. It's a beat from above. It's the beat of Christ's heart. Its rhythm is his timeless wisdom. Its tempo is his time-tested love. And the Sermon on the Mt is the song. In this Sermon, Christ teaches us to live the right way up, in an upside down world. This commentary, written by Terran Williams, draws from some of the best available sources. It will aid in individuals and groups in their study of Christ's teaching in his Manifesto of Life in the Kingdom, Matthew 5-7.

Outline of the Sermon on the Mount

- the life God blesses (5:1-12)
- the call to influence (5:13-16)
- love for the scriptures (5:17-20)
- radical love (5:21-48)
- spirituality before the audience of One (6:1-18)
- pursuing that which is worthy of our lives (6:19-24)
- overcoming anxiety about the future and preoccupation with not-so-important things (6:25-34)
- how *not* to help each other change (7:1-6)
- strong encouragements to pray and love (7:7-12)
- responding to the Sermon's call to radical living (7:13-29)

Matthew 6:25-30 - OVERCOMING ANXIETY ABOUT THE FUTURE AND PREOCCUPATION WITH NOT-SO-IMPORTANT THINGS, PART 1

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?”

We tend to be anxious about the future and we tend to be preoccupied with not-so-important things.

- Jesus says that we tend to worry about what we will eat and drink and what we will wear. What does Jesus mean by this? It seems at least two things:
- Firstly, he means that we tend to worry about our future provision and well-being. We anxiously wonder if we and our dependants (if we have any) will be physically provided for in the days, weeks and months to come. We tend to imagine the worst-case scenarios and then, by the sheer power of imagination, start to believe that this is a very likely future.
- Secondly, he means that we tend to be preoccupied with not-so-important things. “Food and drink” may refer to our longings for pleasure, satisfaction and the finer things in life. “Clothing” can refer to our longing for attractiveness, a good image, staying in touch with the latest trends and fashion. It's not that these longings are wrong, just that we tend to inflate their importance. We tend to run after these things.

First reason not to be anxious: If you have chosen to pursue, focus on and submit your life to God and all that he values, then he will take care of your future needs and the things that are of lesser importance in life.

- This first reason is a conditional one. Jesus starts this section of teaching with the word “therefore”. This means that it relates directly to what has gone before it. So what was Jesus just saying? He was calling his disciples to make a choice to pursue and invest their lives in that which has eternal value (v19-21), to focus their hearts on God and on all that he values (v22-23), and to submit their lives to God rather than to money (v24-25). If we do just that, then we need not worry about our lives. God himself will take care of us.
- However, if we fail to do all that Jesus tells us to do in verses 19-25, then worry and anxiety are inevitable. This is because we are wasting our lives in the pursuit of the wrong stuff, focussing our hearts on the wrong stuff, submitting our lives to unworthy masters. If we do that, then our lives will be marked by insecurity and anxiety.

Second reason not to be anxious: Since God brought us into existence (a great task), he will surely sustain our existence and meet our needs (a small task).

- “Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?” What does this mean? Jesus is reminding his disciples that God has already provided life itself, as well as a body that carries this life. These are very great and important gifts from God. Jesus suggests that since God has willingly given us such great gifts (i.e. life and body) in the past, that he will surely give us these much smaller gifts (i.e. food and clothes) in the future. If God was concerned with doing the great task of bringing us into existence, surely he will see to the little task of sustaining our existence?

26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life [e]?

28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith?”

Third reason not to be anxious: If God provides and cares for the birds and flowers, he will certainly provide and care for his sons and daughters.

- Jesus calls us to become bird-watchers (v26). What do we learn from birds? We learn that they don’t fret and worry about the future. They don’t sow or reap or store away in fear of tomorrow’s lack. Yet God makes sure they get food to eat. They live joyfully every day. They don’t

worry about tomorrow. Jesus then reminds us that if God is ready to provide for birds (of less value to him) then how much more will he provide for us (of much greater value to him).

- Jesus then calls us to become botanists who look at beautiful flowers (v28-30). He refers here to our need to be clothed not only for protection from the elements, but also in order to look good. He humorously reminds us how some plants, doing nothing, are “clothed” with the most beautiful flowers – even more beautiful than the clothing that the famous King Solomon wore! And if these plants live for such a short while, then how much more will our Father clothe us, who are infinitely more valuable to him than these plants? Spurgeon writes, “Lovely lilies, how you rebuke our foolish nervousness” (quoted by Stott, pg 165).
- Note, however, that Jesus is not saying that we should lazily make no effort to provide for ourselves (after all, the birds don’t wait for the food to fall into their beaks, and the flowers deliberately draw sustenance from the sun and soil). Nor is Jesus saying that we should not plan and save for the future (after all, even birds make nests in anticipation of the young, and migrate in anticipation of the seasons). Nor are we exempt from taking care of others, and from facing troubles from time to time. What Jesus is saying is that we are not alone in the pursuit of our future well-being and survival, since if our heavenly Father provides and cares for the birds and flowers, how much will he provide and care for us, his sons and daughters? Although we still need to give ourselves to forethought regarding the future, we must not give ourselves to anxious thought about it.

Fourth reason not to be anxious: It’s pointless being preoccupied with what is beyond your control.

- “Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” (v27). Jesus puts this line between his mention of birds and flowers. He makes a simple point: fretting about the future is pointless. This doesn’t mean we don’t take precautionary measures with regards to our safety and health. It means that we recognize that there is much that is beyond our control (that is in God’s control), and fretting about that will accomplish nothing. Instead we should trust our Father. This doesn’t mean all will be easy. It doesn’t mean he guarantees us that we live to the age of 80. It simply means that worrying about what is beyond our control adds nothing to our life. Interestingly, there is much medical research that shows that a life marked by constant anxiety is very possibly shortened because of the damaging effects of stress.

Fifth reason not to be anxious: Anxiety about the future is evidence that you don’t trust God to look after you.

- Jesus said, “will he not ... clothe you—you of little faith?” (v30). Jesus makes a simple promise to his disciples in this verse. God will provide for us. This promise runs throughout the Bible. For example, “Do not fret ... trust in the Lord and do good, dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart... I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the

righteous forsaken, or their children begging for bread. They are always generous and lend freely, and their children will be blessed.” (Psalm 37:1, 3-5, 25-26). It is one thing as a disciple of Jesus trusting God for our salvation, and the promise of heaven. But it is another thing to trust God to provide for, protect and guide us as we face our daily challenges. Yet we must learn to apply our faith. If we fail to, then Christ has a nickname for us: “You of little faith” (which comes from a Greek phrase that Jesus seems to have made up that literally says “you little-faith”).

reference will be made to these sources throughout this commentary. Each time the author and the page number is mentioned, but not the book title.

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