

COMMENTARY ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Matthew 6:31-34

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 6:31-34 - OVERCOMING ANXIETY ABOUT THE FUTURE AND PREOCCUPATION WITH NOT-SO-IMPORTANT THINGS, PART 2 (continued from Matthew 6:25-30)

31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Sixth reason not to be anxious: You're meant to be different to those who don't know God.

- Pagans (a reference to people who don't know God) run after material things. They are preoccupied with such things, and the preservation and prosperity of their physical lives. It's not wrong to show some interest in food, drink and clothing. It's not wrong to be interested in pleasure, satisfaction, life's finer things, personal attractiveness and fashion. But it is wrong to have a life that has these things at the centre. These things are relatively unimportant in the bigger scheme of things. When a person is far from God they tend to "run after all these things" (v32). They store up earthly treasures instead of heavenly ones (v19-21). They focus on things of temporal value (v22-23). They submit their lives to money rather than to God (v24). Their ambition is godless, and preoccupied with self. This leads to a life of great insecurity and anxiety. The more we trust in and are preoccupied with things, the more vulnerable we are.
- But disciples of Jesus should be different. We are not far from God. We have God as our loving Father. And he has given us something grander to live for. We live for him. We live for his pleasure. We live for the hallowing of his name, the coming of his kingdom, the doing of his will (6:9-10). We live for his kingdom (v33). Our preoccupation is not

material but spiritual. Our passion is not our glory but God's. We find our security in God not things. This brings about great security in our lives.

Seventh reason not to be anxious: Your Father knows and cares about your needs.

- “Your heavenly Father knows that you need them’ (v32). Although our life revolves around God, we are still physical creatures that have needs such as food, drink, clothing, shelter, protection and provision. Wonderfully, Jesus reassures us that our Father knows our needs. He doesn't cruelly expect us to give ourselves to the pursuit of him and his kingdom, and then leave us un-provided for. No, he knows what we need to survive and thrive in his will. And he cares enough to provide for us. Though there may be times that it seems that God has forgotten about your needs, he has not. He is sure to provide in his own time and in his own way. We must never doubt God's knowledge of our situation, his care for us, and his ability to provide.
- The Message paraphrases verse 32 like this: “Don't be so preoccupied with getting that you make no space for the Father's giving.” Those far from God generally focus on their material needs. But as God's people, our consuming focus should not be our material needs, but our Father and his will for our lives. When we focus on our Father rather than our needs, we move from anxiety to trust. We move from a posture focussed on getting, toward one that patiently makes space for the Father's giving. We are not alone in this world. Our Father knows. Our Father cares. Our Father will guide us and provide for us.

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| 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. |
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The first secret to overcoming anxiety is a singular passion for God.

- People far from God “run after ... things” (v32). But God's people should run after God. We all live for something. We're meant to live for God, but when we lose focus on God, lesser things arise to take his place. But Jesus tells us to seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness. It's not that we are to have no interest in lesser things such as food and drink (i.e. pleasures, satisfaction, life's finer things) or clothing (i.e. personal attractiveness, concern about our image, trends and fashions). It's just that these things are so much less important than the main preoccupation of our lives: God's kingdom and righteousness. When we're running after something as great as God's kingdom and righteousness, we don't have the energy or heart-space to be preoccupied with lesser things.
- *We are to seek God's kingdom above all.* Eaton (pg 155) explains what this means: “Jesus is not referring to seeking salvation. The kingdom of God is his royal power at work in and through our lives. It involves desiring God's presence, desiring to please him so that we experience his approval. It involves taking the time and effort to advance his kingdom.” Carson adds (pg 35) that seeking first God's kingdom means “to desire

above all to experience, to submit to, and participate in the spreading of the good news of the saving reign of God". It will involve us making available to God our time, our thought-life, our treasures and our talents. We must remember that God is a King and that Jesus Christ came "at the turning of the tide in human history". Jesus is the Messiah-king. He himself is the King of the Kingdom. To seek the Father's kingdom is synonymous with seeking Christ's kingdom. Stott (pg 170) writes, "God's kingdom is Jesus Christ ruling over his people in total blessing and total demand."

- *We are to seek God's righteousness above all.* Here Jesus speaks of the transforming power Christ brings into the lives of his disciples. We are to passionately desire Christ-like character. It should not be an optional extra in the Christian life. Becoming a person who is more loving, courageous, humble, Scripture-intoxicated, obedient, joyful, zealous and transparent should be something we intentionally move towards. But we must remember that God is not just interested in us becoming more righteous personally. He is interested in the influence that we have on society at large – specifically the way we promote what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. The word "righteousness" also means "justice" and therefore refers to our efforts to promote justice in the world on behalf of the poor and the weak when exploited by the strong and the rich, as well as our efforts to stand against injustice.
- So how does this singular passion for God help us overcome anxiety about the needs of the future? Simple. Jesus promises that if we resolutely and passionately give ourselves to pursuing God, his kingdom, and his will for our lives that he will provide for us. "All these things [i.e. food, drink, clothes] will be added to you as well." What an amazing promise! If we seek God first then we can relax in the promise of provision. Though we don't know what the future holds, we live for the One who holds the future. A life given to the pursuit of God will experience God's powerful support and sovereign provision. As we get behind the things closest to God's heart, he promises to get behind the meeting of our material needs – in his own time (very often the eleventh hour), and in his own way (very often unexpected sources), of course.
- Eaton (pg 157) reminds us that the provision experienced by Christians who are sold out to God's kingdom and righteousness comes not just because of God's supernatural provision, but also in some natural ways. For example, "when people see that we are not living for worldly wealth, they begin to entrust us with worldly wealth. People like to do business with unselfish and trustworthy people. Also, spiritually minded people do not throw their money away on worthless treasures and pleasures."

34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

The second secret to overcoming anxiety is to live one day at a time.

- Jesus speaks of “tomorrow” as if it were a person. “Tomorrow”, almost like an evil spirit, comes to our minds today and starts to afflict us with a list of possible problems. Jesus tells us that when our mind starts to be anxious about tomorrow, we must tell “tomorrow” to go back to where it belongs, which is in the future. We can give realistic forethought to tomorrow. We can humbly make plans for tomorrow. But we cannot indulge anxious thoughts about tomorrow. We should not let our imagination venture into realms that are beyond our control. We simply don’t have the capacity today to cope with what tomorrow may bring.
- Instead we are to live one day at a time. We focus on this day. “Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Jesus suggests that every day will bring a new set of challenges. And that we will need to give ourselves to dealing with these challenges. Remarkably, along with every challenge that Christ permits into our lives (after all, he is sovereign even over our troubles) he also apportions a dose of empowering grace to deal with them. “As your days are, so will your strength be.” God gives us no empowering grace for tomorrow. Empowering grace arrives today, along with some challenging situations. We should live attentive to God’s grace which arrives right here, right now. But if we run ahead in our minds to non-existent imagined problems tomorrow, we miss the grace that arrives to deal with existing, real problems today. Worrying about tomorrow’s problems doesn’t save us from facing tomorrow’s problems. It merely saps us of the strength to meet today’s problems. The solution is to live in the present. The Message paraphrases it like this: “Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.”

Reference is 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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