

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Matthew 6:25-33

Verses 25-27

Therefore I say this to you, do not be anxious about your life, about what you will eat nor what you drink nor your body, how you will be clothed. Is not life more than food and your body [more than] clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They do not sew nor reap nor gather into barns yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than they? Who of you is able to add one hour to his age by worrying?

Therefore (dia) refers to Jesus' previous teaching on where his followers ought to store their treasures, what we should have our eyes on, and the impossibility of serving two masters (vv. 19-24). Faith in Christ is always a single-minded trust or love. But rather than going on to describe our priorities or loyalty of faith, Jesus continues with a gospel imperative, a command that comes out of the gift of salvation we have in him.

I say this to you, is a solemn way of proceeding with his teaching. Jesus is the authoritative speaker for God, for he is God and his word has divine power to judge and save.

Do not worry μεριμνᾶτε is a present imperative and indicates that the children of God do not have to keep on worrying or feel continuously anxious. Christ refers to the basics of life, food, drink and clothing, though he doesn't mention shelter. The point is clear, however. Christians need not be preoccupied with these things, or those things that lead to them such as investments, health, family, job, studies, hard work etc. To know Christ is to know freedom from worry. Jesus does not point to what we have as being wrong or that efforts to make something of oneself and work hard etc are unchristian. All that matters to the Lord is our attitude. He speaks against thinking in an atheistic way that one can only depend on oneself. So, our disposition, the orientation of our desires, thoughts and motives is what God considers. In Judaism, this was well down on the list, after regulations about food, holidays, sacrifice and so on. Thus, Jesus brings to prominence the inner life in relation to God. How do you view your heavenly Father and what is your attitude to the world? This is what is important to him.

Jesus' asks a rhetorical question, **is not your life more than food and your body clothing?** The answer is obvious yet missed by most. Human spiritual blindness is so great that we can deliberately avoid the inner life in favour of the superficial and trivial. For most, the body is the main thing and popular culture makes that so clear: we ought to be worried about fitness, appearance, glamour, fame, flashy material objects, prestigious jobs and elite schools. Again, in themselves, these are not wrong but they are hankered after and made the main thing by most. Luke 12:15 is important in this context. Perhaps mentioning only food, drink and clothing our Lord is suggesting that aiming for abundance is not only idolatry but damaging to our lives for our bodies and minds were meant to be given to much more, to the one who can truly bring fulfillment, freedom and joy.

Jesus gets the people to turn their eyes to the hills and paddocks where they could see birds and wild flowers. The lesson is again so obvious. God **feeds** τρέφει **them**. The birds go unnoticed by us but God takes daily care of them. We, who are of much greater value, should rely on the Lord and be contented in our waiting for God to provide for us. The mentioning of **barns** may be an allusion to prayer for daily bread. In the wilderness, the people were given manna for only one day at a time. Again, it is a question of approach to life and attitude. Of course, Jesus is not saying avoid eating, do not plant, just sit and God will do it all for you. He is saying, first of all, "see, you have a **heavenly Father**" ο πατήρ ο ουράνιος. God is ours, that is, he gives himself to us not as a generic god but **Father**, who is responsible for us as an earthly parent must care for her children. Added to this is our value as bearers of the image of God, and those purchased by Christ to be God's everlasting children. Christ's words, **are you not of greater worth than they**, indicate a priceless value that we have in the eyes of God our Father. Luke 12:7 mentions the hairs on our head, reminding us how closely God is paying attention to the details of our life.

Verses 28-30

And why be anxious about clothing? Observe how flowers of the paddocks grow. They do not toil nor do they spin [thread] but I say to you that Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself as one of them. And if God so clothes the grass of the paddocks, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you of little faith?

The same teaching appears again. It is obvious that we **worriers** as Jesus calls us, cannot even add one hour to our existence by fretting. Our lives are in the hand of God who could allow them to be suddenly shortened or even prolonged whenever he wishes. The **lilies**, probably referring to flowers in general, are like the birds that spring up, grow and come to maturity without the frenetic competition and unsustainable consumption so characteristic of human beings. Like the birds that are of small value to us except as a species, hardly as individuals, grass was mowed without thought and commonly used to heat the clay ovens of Eastern homes. God has gone to elaborate lengths in the fashioning and care of the simplest items of creation, so the lesson is blindingly clear: **since** εἰ this is the way he acts towards grass and bare hills, **how much more you, little-faith-people!** ολιγόπιστοι. There is a sting in Jesus' words here. He is more than a teacher. Here he stands apart from all of humanity and looks on them as though they were from a different planet, or rather, that he was from heaven and we were mere pathetic strugglers on earth. His divine status was never far below the surface of whatever he said.

Jesus touches on the law. His law convicts us: we do not have the ability in ourselves to trust in the love of the heavenly Father - the Father he knows so well - but must plunge ourselves into griefs, impatience, and unsettledness as we try to control the universe and its future with the feeble power of our minds.

vv.31-33

Therefore, do not be anxious saying, "what shall we eat" or "what shall we drink" or "what shall we wear?" For the ungodly people of the world strive for all these things but your heavenly Father knows that you need the whole lot. But seek first the kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Jesus concludes his teaching on the matter of worry. Though our concerns may not be literally the same, the issue is the same. Today, we may ask about global warming, worry over the impact of the credit crisis on our jobs, and be anxious about drought, reservoir levels and so on. **For all the non-believers chase these things** επιζητοῦσιν, which include concern over house renovations or superannuation. In itself, concern is not a sin. It is making the need for tomorrow's bread and what supports the obtaining of daily bread central in our lives. The old prophets said in a round about way that you become what you believe (Jeremiah 2:5). If you worship a foolish idol you become foolish yourself. In the same way, when obtaining money for daily necessities as well as other things become the focus, then we become merely a material entity, a mere body, a mouth on legs. On the other hand, it works the other way. When Christ is at the centre we become Christ-like, godly, holy, dedicated to the Lord, compassionate, full of the hope for life beyond what we see.

For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things οἶδεν χρῆζετε. What reassurance our Lord gives us here. God knows all of our needs in every detail and our needs keep coming before him so that his awareness of us is constant, indeed, continuing while we sleep.

It is not so easy to distinguish whether Jesus is referring to God only as our Creator or also as our Saviour. Yes, God has a Creator's love for us as the work of his hands, but Jesus seems to go beyond this. He calls God **Father**, because God is directly involved in our existence. Since Jesus is on intimate terms with him he assures us that he is speaking for him. Of course, Israel knew of God as Redeemer, but for Jesus, God is a familiar being. It is as though the world is like a window and as he looks at commerce, the market place, herds of sheep and people measuring out their money hoping it will go a bit further, he sees a clear picture of God working behind the scenes to ensure his children receive what they require. Since God is that close, his love is immediate and available, why worry? For Jesus, God is not a mechanistic deity but a personal and intimate being of infinite compassion. So, Creator and Saviour come together in Jesus'

concept of God. In his ministry of healing, suffering, death and resurrection, we see this being of God in Christ.

Thus the last verse, **Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.** Jesus' view of God and how he operates, that is, his **kingdom βασιλείαν**, which is the gospel of salvation and eternal care, means that the only thing worth living for is God. The gospel in Jesus' teaching here is that we can know the Lord and the way he operates through him and find that God deeply cares for every part of our lives, especially our essential needs. He is truly our Father, not only our Creator but one who in Christ will go to the greatest trouble and even death and hell to cherish us and give our lives eternal value. To **seek first** ζῆτετε πρῶτον means trusting and resting securely in him, treating God like a well-loved armchair, full of comfort and always able to hold us up. To seek his **righteousness δικαιοσύνην** repeats the good news behind God's kingdom, that God will be good to us. Another and perhaps better understanding of righteousness, is the accompanying action of trust, which is obedience to God, fulfilling his will of love, witness, prayer for the world and the church.

We can have negative thoughts about our lives and this increases our anxious striving and need to work harder and do all we can to prevent loss of control over our existence. How futile this is yet we want to be like God and run our entire existence. When you pause to think about this, it would require complete mastery over the Big Bang and all events as the universe unfolds and expands. Incredibly stupid and yet most human beings try to do it. What a change when we know God is righteous, he acts according to his divine nature as revealed to us in Jesus, that is, with the deepest love. We are to work hard, to expand our business, choose our clothing, and research the next purchase, but God wants to be first in these actions, that is, he wants to cook, feed and clothe. This is what he is good at.

When the gospel and our trust run together then God promises that he will take responsibility for such an easy thing as feeding and clothing us.

The last sentence can be summarized thus, "Stop worrying. Think of God as your Father and what he gives and the other things will happen in their right order".