

# WEALTH AND WORRY AGAINST GOD'S KINGDOM

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Matthew 6: 24-34

Story: A former bishop of mine visited with young people before confirmation. He asked if they knew who he was. The answer was immediate: you're a miserable sinner! The Bishop howled and told the teens this was absolutely correct. He was a miserable sinner. But telling everyone that they were miserable sinners was not Jesus' approach. **He came to bring new life to a world in need of authentic life.**

Two biggies were discussed by Jesus- **worry and wealth.** Don't worry, he says. Living without worry sounds as impossible as living without breathing. All those things that affect us personally, as families, and in the church: Anxious moments of raising kids, keeping careers in tack, mortgages, inflation, fear of war and recession and increased costs of health care, food, gas prices. On and on we list them.

Jesus' own life was not based on escaping the shadows and darkness and pressures of life by isolating himself and offering a new philosophy where the intellect could hide. No, He was and is interested in the whole human condition and that includes our everyday common experiences.

Jesus told people not to worry about tomorrow because **God is present in the moment.** And, because God stands in each moment with each of us, He will take care of our future as well.

Worry, is useless because it doesn't add one valuable aspect to our living. The past can't be changed, and the future cannot be known. Worry fails us. It's like paying interest on what one

has yet to receive. Who wants that? But, the reality is we do worry. We can't help ourselves. I can't help myself either. When my kids were growing up and today as young adults, when my family members became terminally ill, when our daughter was critically injured, when my sister went into surgery and never recovered. Worry is real. And, it can't be couched in spiritual language (I.e. concern).

Christians do have hardships. Jesus wasn't being unfeeling or unrealistic when he said not to worry. No, he was being practical. He personally knew hunger and felt the pain of others. But these things did not make a wedge between Him and his Father. He believed his father would always cover him- even through fiery ordeals and personal suffering.

For those who follow Christ, worry is a stumbling block. Jesus made it clear. Give our worries to Him. Trust Him enough to lay them at his feet and let Christ carry them for us. Jesus also made it clear we cannot serve two masters, God and wealth. It is impossible to be devoted to God if our primary focus is on mammon- wealth and things money will buy. The more we have, the more we want to keep it, increase it, and stop others from stealing it! Sound familiar? The ancients had it right: money is like sea water. The more you drink, it, the thirstier you get. The thirst is never satisfied and the wrong kind of water can eventually kill you.

So what to do is the question. When we don't have resources to take care of the daily essentials- food, clothing, housing, health care, kids' education, difficult as it may seem, this is where trust and confidence in God rules the day for the believer. It's in these very situations when God gives us peace as we turn to Him and trust that he has our own best interest at heart. That is

amazing news. God wants what is best for us, that is eternal, lasting. A Wheaton College senior who recently worked as an intern in the White House made this observation: “ in Washington a lot of energy is devoted to things with very little lasting value.” Too much emphasis on too trivial of matters means some higher priorities are not being met. The point of today’s gospel is: God cannot be rivaled. Either God is real to us and can be trusted to give us what is essential, or our concerns take priority and God is second in our devotion.

I don’t believe we can have a good perspective on worry and wealth without first going back to the beginning of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in chapter 5. What we are discussing today is actually part of a much larger picture Jesus offers. His invitation to the first disciples was to experience something brand new, to see beyond what they understood, of Jesus himself. I believe that when his followers gathered in the quiet and secluded grove of trees above the beautiful Galilee, **Jesus was magnetic – and drew them into his powerful presence that exuded safety and promise and quiet joy- and his words were words to encourage.**

He was saying I want to open your eyes and hearts and I want to show you God has come near to you. Even though circumstances are not and never will be perfect, I bring abundant life that is different from the world’s view. I bring life that is lasting. What Jesus offered then, and now, was Himself, and a personal relationship. That is why he said it was wonderful news for those who are **poor in spirit, those who already know their only security is in God, those who do not have an arrogant sense of self worth, but position themselves under the Lord’s keeping.** This is wonderful news. For you who depend on God belong to God’s world.

Jesus goes on. There is wonderful news for you who **mourn – those who see the heart ache in the world, the devastation from wars and famine, and natural tragedy, and the broken conditions of human beings. Those who grieve for peace, those who grieve to see inhumanity changed so that dignity is given to every person. You who grieve for yourself and others- even those who turn against you- you will be comforted.**

It is really quite amazing that when our greatest desire is to see and receive Jesus, he gives us his mercy **and-** the gift of compassion for others. When we hunger and thirst for the things of God we will be truly fed. The Sermon on the Mount is not a picture of idyllic idealism. No, it is a more creative way to see our relation to all of life from a different perspective than the world's understanding. And, that begins with a personal connection- coming and sitting before Jesus and having him tell you and me why he has come for us- To have him open the eyes to our hearts and minds to hear his words of love for us- to tell us his way of suffering is to save us, and yes- His way is meant to stir up in us hope and faith and joy.

The teen got it right. We are miserable sinners. But Christ...brought something we cannot live without in our troubled world. Himself. He is real and desires to be made real in our lives. Two questions for our consideration: What worries you? And, what do you and I really value?

Christ has come into the world, not to condemn but to save us. And, in his coming to give abundant life. This is his desire for us, to be set free- not in the world's abundance but in Him.

Amen