

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 6: Worries, Part 2; Judging others

OUR TREASURES, OUR WORRIES

1. In 6:19-24 Jesus addresses general earthly pursuits. In 6:25-34 worry over the basic needs of food, drink and clothing (and “your body”; 25) are addressed. This passage culminates in the promise of v. 33: “Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” We may note three things about this promise:

- i. The promise regards basic needs; However we understand this promise it can’t preclude the sort of suffering Jesus and Paul and the other disciples experienced
- ii. The promise is made to a community of believers; the “you” in this passage is plural: “Seeking God’s kingdom means valuing what God values and obeying his commands: it is when his people care for others in need among them that God supplies the needs of his people as a whole, perhaps because then he can best trust them to use his gifts righteously (Deut 15:1-11...¹).”²
- iii. The promise follows the antecedent “strive first for the kingdom of God.”

(a) Given these three points (esp. i), does this promise even address the things which make you anxious?

(b) What about the “200,000,000 Christians worldwide (to say nothing of other people) living below any reasonable poverty line”? Do we really have the temerity to conclude they are all suffering because they are failing to pursue God’s kingdom? How do we understand this passage without so qualifying it that it is emptied of power?

2. Consider the following reading of 6:19-34:

A soldier must trust to the supply chain for basic needs nor be distracted by concerns over food and clothing, but is to focus on his mission, trusting that his or her superior officer is handling these things. As soldier he may face privation at times in the course of duty. Similarly, we are to focus on our mission, and can validly trust that God know what we need and we won’t be neglected if not necessary. Furthermore, as a part of the (Lord’s) army, we will sometimes be part of the supply chain of others.

How well does this metaphor fit the passage? (E.g., unlike the metaphorical soldier, we also look forward to an eternal future in the life to come.)

3. Craig Keener writes, “The early Christians extended the principle of not serving two masters to avoiding theaters (where humans were routinely slaughtered for public entertainment, akin to much modern entertainment except that

¹ Deut 15:10: “Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.”

² Blomberg (1992), p. 82. Interpreting this passage individually is discouraged by two other passages: Lk 12:31, where Jesus tells his disciples to sell their possessions and give the proceeds to the poor; and Mk 10:29-30, where Jesus declares that those who give up family or property for the Lord will receive in return a hundredfold in both categories, not only in the life to come but also in this age.

it was not fictitious; Tert. Spec. 26³)...”⁴

Also discussing this passage, Blomberg points out: “Whether literally or mentally gazing, Christians must focus on all that is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, well-spoken of, virtuous and praiseworthy (Phil 4:8) rather than succumbing to worldly ‘lust of the eyes’ (1 Jn 2:16).” What books, television shows, movies or magazines fit this description? What media do we partake of which might be thought of as serving a second master (if only with our attention)?

4. See the handout, “Suggestions for Rich Christians,” which gives practical suggestions for Christian living based on Jesus’ teaching. Discuss this list in light of your experience as an American Christian.



Fun fact: The “straight and narrow” derives from Jesus’ metaphors of the narrow gate. The passage, however, says nothing about the straightness of the road. That comes from the KJV, which refers to the gate as “strait”, an archaic word for “narrow”, deriving from the Latin strictum. (*Expositor’s Commentary*)

³ “Why may not those who go into the temptations of the show become accessible also to evil spirits? We have the case of the woman—the Lord Himself is witness—who went to the theatre, and came back possessed. In the out-casting, accordingly, when the unclean creature was upbraided with having dared to attack a believer, he firmly replied, And in truth I did it most righteously, for I found her in my domain. Another case, too, is well known, in which a woman had been hearing a tragedian, and on the very night she saw in her sleep a linen cloth—the actor’s name being mentioned at the same time with strong disapproval—and five days after that woman was no more. How many other undoubted proofs we have had in the case of persons who, by keeping company with the devil in the shows, have fallen from the Lord! For no one can serve two masters. [Matthew 6:24] What fellowship has light with darkness, life with death? [2 Corinthians 4:14]”

⁴Craig Keener’s Matthew Commentary, p. 233.