

Sermon on the Mount

Lesson 5 – Righteousness and Wealth

Matthew 6:19-34

Many have called the Sermon on the Mount an ordination message for the newly chosen twelve apostles. Though it was preached on a specific mountain at a specific time, this is a wonderful example of what Jesus taught every day! Let's sit at the feet of Jesus and learn too!

When it comes to wealth, whether in plenty or need, both bring spiritual dangers to the heart of man. At this point of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will address both realities of riches and the attitude members of the kingdom, those that are His followers, should hold.

“To set one's heart on material possessions or to worry about the lack of them is to live in perpetual insecurity and to deprive oneself of the spiritual blessings of God.” KJV Study Bible p. 1424

I. Righteousness with Wealth In Deuteronomy 28, God told Israel if they were faithful to Him, they would be blessed with much. At the time of Christ, the Jewish mindset had warped this principle of God as seen in this Rabbinical saying, “Whom the Lord loveth, He maketh rich.” The foundation was not on obeying and loving God, but simply gathering “treasures.” With that thought, many Jews did all they could to accumulate wealth. Just as with the areas of worship Jesus covered earlier, the Jews desired “to be seen,” “appear,” and “to receive the glory of men” showing off their riches and wealth all considered as blessings from God!! Jesus is going to reset this false belief with simple truth!

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust (Gk - eating) doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:” Matthew 6:19

Wrong Attitude: Life's goal and satisfaction cannot be found in the number of treasures one accumulates. Jesus points out that accumulated wealth attracts disappointment! Bugs and bad guys! This is an Old Testament, God principle! Prov. 23:4

“treasures upon earth” – This word means more than money. Think of it as an object of exceptional value that needed to be kept safe and when lost brings sadness. Name some in your life!

“moth and rust” – The word “rust” actually means, “eating” and could just be associated with the act of a moth! But in other ancient writings, the Greek word has been translated as associated with metals and dealing with rust or corrosion. James 5:1-3

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: ²¹ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:20-21

Righteous Attitude: Life's goal and satisfaction should not be found in earthly treasures, but in living for God and collecting eternal riches in heaven! Two treasure holds – heaven or earth (not secure)

“treasures in heaven” - Treasures in heaven are not limited to tithing in the offering box or giving to the needs of others. Keep in mind, heavenly treasures are eternal and permanent, those things taken with you beyond the grave. Matthew 19:21

- Godly life and testimony – obedience to God

- Souls brought to Christ
- Souls disciplined and taught
- Resources given to the needy, church ministry, for gospel outreach
- Time sacrificed and invested in others to ease load

“heart” - What must be realized is the place possessions take in your heart! Where is your **affection**? Here’s a test: **1. How do you react when you lose something?** Or it is broken, stolen, marred, dropped, smashed, lost, burned down, market crashes, scratched, torn, stained, or dented. Does the loss of earthly treasures bring you great sadness or anger? It’s natural to be disappointed but we must evaluate, was it held too tightly, loved too much? Jesus will teach this truth again in Luke 12 and 18.

2. What occupies more of your thoughts, time, and efforts? The things of God or the things of this world? Wealth is not being condemned here, but the love of it more than God! James 4:4

“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. ²³But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! ²⁴No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold (Lit. – loyal) to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Aramaic - includes all possessions, wealth, riches, money).”
Matthew 6:22-24

Righteous Attitude Explained:

“light of the body is the eye” – symbolism for spiritual vision – good or bad Here it is applied to the heart’s attitude toward wealth. This view affects every part of man. Jesus will use this very same illustration in Luke 11:34, but there the application is to spiritual life.

“eye be single” – This deals with good 20-20 spiritual vision when it comes to riches! One’s heart and riches are in balance, their direction, aim, and goals are defined and movement is steady.

“eye be evil” – Here is the attitude of wealth spiritually out of focus. Within this person, things of the world are out of proportion to what God desires for man. Self-serving wants, interests, and goals block the vision God sets in His word. They often seek the applause of men, try to keep up with the world, and find satisfaction in earthly riches.

“serve two masters” = “God and mammon” – Jesus sums up this whole section on “treasures” by saying you **can’t serve God and serve the things of this world!** Notice, He did not say, “must not,” or “should not,” but He said you “cannot!” It’s not possible! Have you ever tried to split your loyalties? Maybe between two jobs, or friends, or between multiple responsibilities. It doesn’t work very well, does it? Just as you can’t focus on two things at once, or a slave could not serve two masters, a person cannot live whole-hearted, 100% dedicated to God, and hold tightly to earthly possessions. The danger here is misplaced love and affection!
1John 2:15

II. Righteousness without Wealth Jesus continues His teaching on wealth by turning to those without it. Those who have very little of even the basic needs of life and He immediately addresses one of the defaults of man, worry! Notice Jesus’ use of questions to remind them of their value before their heavenly Father. Christ will drive the fact home, that **one must have faith in the care and provision of God** for His children.

“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought (Lit. worry about) for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” Matthew 6:25

Wrong Attitude: Worrying about the needs of life shows faithlessness in God! Please realize, worry is covetousness; it's unspiritual to believe getting stuff will make you happy and solve all your problems! Don't confuse it with planning or concern. Worry spins in circles, does not work in a clear direction; worry makes up scenarios, not actively seeking God for solutions, worry blames others, and does not pray. Worry is a sin of the spirit! R. Mounce a renowned Bible scholar who helped translate the NIV, NLB, and ESV Bibles said this about worry, "Worry is **practical atheism** and an **affront to God**." Wow – that calls worry for what it is! SIN

"Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" – Answer – Of course it is! Jesus forces an answer from His listeners that will help build their faith and confidence in God's love and provision for them. The truth is, we are so much more to God than what we eat and what we wear! So much more than the physical things of this world. He gave us life; will He not provide for it? The answer, of course, He will! The Jews had a cliché at the time of Christ, "Start your worry when there's only one loaf in the basket." Jesus is changing that thought, "Don't worry even if there are no loaves in your basket!"

Wrong Attitude Explained: Jesus started His teaching on God's provision, by reminding the listeners that life is so much more than the physical needs. Now He will systematically show their important place in the heart and mind of God!

"Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" Matthew 6:26

"fowls" = "Are ye not much better than they?" – I love birds, I have loved birds since my teacher, Mrs. Westphal, did a unit on birds back in 4th grade! My sons have inherited my love for birds, one of them found a bird app and we can be found walking around with our phones listening and identifying bird sounds! It's so much fun! I love birds! As I write this, it's early on a spring morning, and the Robins are noisy and active looking through the grass for nice juicy worms! What's fun to see is how often they catch one! Ever try and grab a worm in the grass? It's not easy! They are fast and slimy little creatures! But despite not worrying and not spending energy in endless anxiety, God provides for not only Robins, but Blue Jays, Crows, Turkeys, Hummingbirds, Eagles, Owls, and all of His birds! Ps. 147:9; Matt. 10:29; Luke 12:24 Matthew Henry said, in the 1700s, "He that feeds His birds surely will not starve His babes." p. 1445

Jesus asks another question to get His audience to consider God's provisions.

"Which of you by taking thought (Lit. worry) can add one cubit unto his stature (Lit. maybe age)?" Matthew 6:27

"stature" = "can add one...?" – Many commentaries and Bible scholars believe "stature" may refer to adding time to your life span. There seems no firm evidence to this, and, both height and length of life fit the point Jesus is making! We can't add height or length to our lives, only God can!

"And why take ye thought (Lit. worry) for raiment? Consider (see and now, learn from) the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: ²⁹And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" Matthew 6:28-30

"lilies" = "shall he not much more clothe you...?" – There on the mountainside, Jesus is using the objects around Him to point to God's faithfulness! The wildflowers were another wonderful example of God's perfect and beautiful provision for His creation. Jesus told them that Solomon, the epitome of the Jewish glory

days, was not dressed as stunningly as these fragile, short-lived flowers. Jesus, the all-eternal Son of God, viewed Solomon and knew this to be true!

“O ye of little faith?” – Faithlessness is always the problem with the followers of God. From Adam to Abraham, Moses to David, all throughout the Old and New Testaments we see those who love God and desire to follow Him, suffer from occasional faithlessness, a lack of genuine belief in the goodness and mercy of God! We must have engrafted into our souls, God never fails! Money and riches can fail, but God cannot!

“Therefore take no thought (Lit. worry) saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? ³²(For after all these things do the Gentiles (Lit. heathen, unbelievers, pagan) seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.”
Matthew 6:31-32

Wrong Attitude Restated: Ladies, the truth is that women over the ages, and even today, spend a lot of time and energy preparing, making, hauling, purifying, baking, spinning, sewing, purchasing, hunting, raising, cleaning, hemming, repairing, butchering, canning, freezing, buying,.....food, drink, and clothing. And I’m afraid we all can spend a lot of time worrying about food, drink, and clothing, too!

“after all these things do the Gentiles seek:” – We can worry and fuse over these basic needs just as those who know nothing of God and His goodness! Eph. 4:17-18 Jesus is saying, “Don’t live like an unbeliever!”

“your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” – All men, women, and children have need of food, drink, and clothing. Those are needs. Jesus is telling both those hearing Him that day, and us, that we can be confident God knows our needs. He is aware and will provide. This is a fact Jesus had already made when speaking about prayer in verse 8.

Here is Jesus’ summary, and climax statement of this lesson on righteousness and Wealth

“But seek (verb in continual action – keep seeking) ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Matthew 6:33

Righteous Attitude:

“seek ye first” = “kingdom of God” + “his righteousness” – The first concern of life should not be these basic, everyday needs of food, drink, and clothing. Jesus gives us two areas that should be sought first, **1) kingdom of God** – one of the main objects of Jesus’ message and ministry! The sphere of salvation – the Gospel here on earth, the Kingdom to come, the church, other believers, the spreading of truth – anything that has to do with God’s plan and then **2) His righteousness** – living God’s way, His will, by the Word of God, spiritual values, the devotion of our heart, soul, and mind! Ps. 37:3, 25

“all these things” = “added unto you.” – Make your priority spiritual and God will care for the material. Those needs that you have. Jesus didn’t say “some,” but He used the little three-letter word, “all.” Rom. 8:32

Even as I studied this, and read and pondered Jesus’ words, I thought of the sad stories of faithful believers throughout the ages who for one reason or another suffered hunger and starvation. Some because of persecution, some by famine, wars, or natural disasters. I found my heart wondering how to make the connection between those facts and Jesus’ words, “all these things shall be added unto you.” 1) **we live in a fallen, sinful world** –

the Devil is the Prince and Power of the air and bad things come. 2) **God's will may be for His follower to glorify Him through difficulty** – just as a cancer diagnosis, a sudden car crash, a child's illness, or suffering through hunger or need, maybe another way to bring God glory. We all must walk through faith in times of difficulty, knowing God can answer prayers, heal, and give all we need! Rom. 8:28 3) **Opportunity for believers to aid one another** and in doing so be a witness to the world. 2 Cor. 8:13-15

“Take therefore no thought (Lit. worry) for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought (Lit. worry) for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” Matthew 6:34

Appendix to Worry: How about tomorrow's worries? Jesus tells us here, don't waste your time! Tomorrow will have enough issues to deal with then. One of my study books said, “It is fruitless to be concerned about the future when no promise is given to us of a future here on this earth.” Pentecost p. 185 Too many times we fabricate hypothetical problems and solutions wasting so much time and energy! We would be much better off putting that time into earnest, honest prayer. Planning, saving, storing, organizing, or collecting, is not prohibited by God; He wants us to work and provide for our family. 1 Tim. 5:8 tells us, “But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” We must seek God for guidance and then be ok with changes He might make! We cannot be “in love” with our plans and desires! We must hold all our plans lightly and trust God with the outcome. Wise planning can't substitute faith.

Believers Application:

Dangers of Wealth and Protection from It:

We live in one of the richest nations in the world. Our cupboards and closets are full, the fields and barns are bountiful, we have the money to go to the store or shop online for almost any item we desire, our IRA's, 401K, 403B, pensions plans, and even social security has us ready to live in comfort in retirement! Most of the world sees us as wealthy and spoiled! Here are a few spiritual dangers with all this wealth! Let's consider.

1. A false sense of security – against calamity
2. Can lead to faithlessness – substitute faith for wealth.
3. Heart and mind are on wealth, not heaven.
4. Life burden – take care, protect, store, and accumulate wealth.
5. Hard to even become saved! Mark 10:23-25
6. Overestimating needs vs. wants.
7. Attitude of adding God to life, not needing God.
8. Less time and effort for things of God.

Protection: Live generously to others and the Lord's work! Money is needed to move the work of God forward. Read I Tim. 6:6-12; 17-19

Dangers of Worry and Protection from It:

1. All-consuming to mind and emotions. Disrupt productivity – harmful not helpful. Negatively affects the way you treat others - Steals joy and praise – Can't have faith and worry at the same time. v. 30 (trust God to meet your needs)
2. Reduces your trust in God – He is your heavenly Father v. 32 Remember, He cares for His children!
3. Distracts from God's will – v. 33 Put God first, so He can be glorified!

Read Proverbs 30:7-9