

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(October 16, 2016)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Life, the Jesus Way
(Studies in the Sermon on the Mount)

Freedom from Worryism and Materialotry Study #8
(Matthew 6:19-34)

Introduction: Present tense...

This past week was, for me, a pretty emotional week.

Last Sunday I saw for myself and then heard lots of people reporting a GREAT launch to Encuentro. That made Sunday a happy day, indeed.

And then Jack Biros and Landry Saathoff both told me about a really wonderful youth retreat last weekend. I rejoiced over that news - and kept on rejoicing at the news of a new grandson for Jack and Sue!

I was deeply encouraged after several talks with people who are taking spiritual "next steps." I was moved when I heard two separate stories of genuine, sacrificial love flowing from one person to another. That's "MISSION: ACCOMPLISHED" around here.

I heard some sobering news from a good friend that left me really, really sad.

Events happened that prompted an emotional response. For you and for me, that's the way most emotions operate.

Something happens and then we feel something. Anger, joy, relief, frustration, sadness.

One of the exceptions to the emotion rule is worry and fear. Worry, in particular, does not concern itself with what has happened, but with what has not happened.

Other emotions live in the real world. Worry lives in the "what if" world of potential. I worry about what might be. I worry about a future that hasn't happened yet.

As Mark Twain once wrote, "I've lived through some terrible things in my life, some of which actually happened."

Some of us are more tempted to worry than others. But there's no shortage of stuff to be worried about, whether you are a worry-wart or not.

Review...

In recent weeks, we have listened as Jesus has "taken on" our long-accepted understandings of how to live and please God. He has replaced those understandings, raised the bar, and focused on the heart and inner motivation.

I've been severely challenged by what Jesus has said about anger and lust and love AND by what He said about giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting.

Today, the Sermon on the Mount has the Lord moving in a new direction. This morning, He's not re-interpreting ancient commands. Today, He's guiding us through day-to-day life.

This morning, we are going to listen as Jesus helps us navigate the distressing world in which we live and brings freedom from worryism and materialotry. (It's always a good week when I can make up a new word.)

Not surprisingly, Jesus' first words focus on wealth and our relationship to money.

Walk Wisely in this World / Walking in Wisdom (vv. 19-24)

Invest for the Looong Haul (vv. 19-21)

Bad storage (v. 19)

[19] “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.”

Treasure’s value

Jesus wants you and me to think about the treasures of this world. Material treasures.¹

Think of treasures of cash and financial instruments and investments. If you’ve ever seen the show, “Antiques Roadshow”, think of assets that increase in value over time, like that bottle cap you’ve been saving for the last thirty years that’s now worth \$40,000.

Think of toys that you treasure as you get older. Toys that you drive or take to the lake, toys that you wear on your wrist or that you sit and watch.

We treasure our treasures. And there is, actually, value in our treasure. There is great benefit in having certain treasure.

Wise King Solomon told us to learn from the ants. The ants get ready for winter by storing up food during the summer. Storing up treasure for future needs - expected and unexpected - is a great idea. Preparation is smart. (Proverbs 6:6-8)

Sure, the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil (1 Timothy 6:10), but money and its treasure is not, in and of itself, evil.²

¹ The Old Testament idea was that God’s blessing consisted of material wealth. Job’s story shows this, as his material wealth was restored at the end. The New Testament message is different, as evidenced by Jesus’ and Paul’s poverty and by their comments that faithfulness in this life will bring hardship.

² We are told that we may enjoy the things that money buys. (1 Timothy 4:3-4)

And yet, there is a problem with money and with material treasure. The problem is perishability.

Treasure’s pitfalls

In Jesus’ day, a major indicator of wealth was a collection of clothing. A closet-full of clothes was a safeguard against want. If you owned more clothing than you needed, you were considered rich.

But moths eat clothes. Clothes can rip and tear. Clothes will eventually wear out.

In 2016, treasure may be measured by the rising and falling stock market. The valleys and peaks of the market can make an investor queasy. Inflation - if it is extreme - will destroy wealth that’s been built over generations.

The cars we depend on depreciate. Our houses need upkeep. Thieves steal.

Jesus’ reference to “rust” makes us think of farm implements deteriorating in the field. For us, here today, that’s not so much our current reality. So think of the built-in obsolescence in all of your tech treasures. They all have to be regularly replaced and upgraded.

And there is a problem with our treasure beyond perishability. That additional problem is that treasure’s satisfaction fades.

We are thrilled when we acquire a treasure. But as time passes, we’re less thrilled. The treasure has to be protected and then fixed. It’s not long before the treasure you own owns you.

The accumulation of material treasure can be like a drug, where there is diminishing return without increasing dosage. So, we spend - and we’re still not satisfied.

We are hard-wired from God to be satisfied with nothing less than permanence. But there is no permanence in our stuff.

Ebenezer Scrooge is nobody's hero. Hoarding brings no satisfaction. And material treasure is not secure. There are no guarantees. Treasure perishes.

So, Jesus points us to a better way to live than the way of treasuring material treasure.

Good storage (v. 20)

[20] "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal"

When you put your financial resources in a financial instrument you hope to get a good ROI (Return On Investment.)

Well, today, some Certificates of Deposit yield upwards of a solid 1% (!). You may hope to get a 10% yield on stocks or mutual funds - but you might lose. With these investments you're stuck between a dud and insecurity.

Jesus has a tip for you, a sure thing, a safe bet. Take your treasure and invest it in His kingdom. Use it to further His purposes. Use your money to meet pressing needs of people.

You have treasure. Great! Steward it wisely and prepare for the future. And then use your treasure to...

- support missionaries;
- serve the poor.³
- resource local ministries;
- fund Gospel initiatives;

Jesus says that when you place your resources to work for His purposes, you are laying up treasure in heaven. He will reward you for those investments. And your ROI is guaranteed to be glorious.⁴

³ With our treasure we can provide for the needs of loved ones (Proverbs 13:22; 1 Timothy 5:8) AND be generous toward those in need. (Galatians 6:10)

⁴ Check out these verses on rewards: Matthew 5:12, 30, 46; 6:6, 15; 10:42; 18:5; 25:40; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Timothy 6:13-19.

And Jesus isn't finished. He says that investing your material treasure in what God is all about in the world will *determine* the posture of your heart and that will *determine* the direction of your life.

The treasure principle (v. 21)

[21] "for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

It is tempting to believe the opposite. It's tempting to believe that if I follow my heart, I will end up giving. And that is a nice thought. It is not, though, what Jesus says. He says that if you start giving, your heart will follow.⁵

Life's passions follow treasure. What we choose to value most highly will inevitably take center stage in our hearts.

So, if you begin to place value on the things of God - His glory, His reign, His holiness - and start investing your treasure in those commodities, you will soon find that you will love God and the things on His heart more than you did before.

Kathy and I have seen this work out in our own lives.

A few years ago, we started giving money to support a homeless ministry in Denver. We now care more about people facing homelessness than we ever did before. That care started with a check.

We also started supporting a ministry that serves persecuted Christians. Because we have shared our treasure with that ministry, our hearts have been moved more and more to care about and to pray for our persecuted family, worldwide.

Jesus counsels that we should lay up treasure in heaven where we will get a better ROI than the best Wall Street can offer AND our hearts will begin to beat more with the things that move God's heart.

⁵ Biblically speaking, the heart is the center of the personality - controls mind, will, emotions.

But I have talked with lots of very sincere Christ-followers who have told me that it is carnal to pursue eternal rewards. OK. But if that's true, then Jesus was counseling carnality, for He repeatedly tells us to pursue eternal rewards.

According to Jesus, getting along in this world, His way, requires investing in the next world. Getting along in this world also demands that we keep our eyes open.

Open Your Eyes (vv. 22-23)

Your eyes are your life's lamps (v. 22a)

[22a] "The eye is the lamp of the body..."

We navigate our day with the assistance of our eyes. Good eyesight allows us to avoid potholes. Closed eyes or damaged eyesight invites disaster.

The eye is also the portal through which life's input flows. What the eye sees informs the mind. What the eye sees turns the heart. So, an eye turned to good stuff brings health and vitality. An eye that is turned to evil pollutes us, internally and morally.⁶

Good and bad eyes/lamps (vv. 22b-23)

[22b] "...so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light." [23] "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"

Given the context of having just spoken about treasure, I believe that here, Jesus is telling us to think about bad eyes and good eyes with respect to treasure, too. A good eye is generous. A bad eye is greedy.

Without the ability to see - or without the willingness to look out - we run into obstacles and drop straight into potholes of stinginess.

The bad eye is miserly and covetous. It sees what it wants and it seizes it.⁷ The good eye sees need and gives in response. If you've got 20/20 moral vision, you shield your heart by viewing what is holy and you see your way to walk in that holiness.

Right now, there is a pitched battle raging to win your heart's allegiance. We heard Jesus say, **[5:8] "Blessed are the pure in heart..."**

In this morning's words, that would be, "Blessed are those who lay up treasure in heaven and don't hoard here on earth." And "Blessed are those who keep their eye trained on the pure, the holy."

And we should make no mistake about it. One will win that battle - God or treasure, God or covetousness. Or, as the Lord goes on to say, God or "**wealth.**"

Part-Time Disciples (v. 24)

[24] "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

The word my Bible translates "**wealth**" is an old Aramaic word: "**mammon.**"

According to one source,⁸ mammon is that in which we trust. It is our treasure, the stuff of life, the things we own.

Here, Jesus personifies Mammon. God has redeemed your eternal soul and has a claim on your heart. But Mammon wants your heart's loyalty.

⁷ Jesus' audience there on the mountain top was probably thinking of the Pharisees, whose love of money was well-known.

⁸ Cited in Constable.

⁶ The eye, as Jesus refers to it here, is similar in function to the heart.

So picture God and Mammon as two slave owners. You are the slave; I am the slave. No slave works part-time for two masters.

Most slaves don't have a choice of masters, but Jesus says that you and I are slaves with a choice. We can choose to submit to the rule of a gracious God or we can submit to Mammon.

It will be one and it can't be both.⁹

I have been a Christian for a long time. And I testify to you that making the Lord Jesus the Lord of my life has not been a "one and done" thing.

Every day is a battle.

I am faced with a never-ending series of choices. Will I submit to His Lordship - here and now - or not? Will I value heaven's rewards above the temporary feel-good rewards of this life? Will I live with eyes fixed on the pursuit of holiness? Will I follow Mammon or God?

I can't claim final victory yet. The fight is on-going as of October 16, 2016. But I can tell you that the moments when I try to serve God and Mammon are the worst moments of any day or week. Money, wealth, treasure all make wonderful servants and can accomplish great, God-honoring things. But Mammon makes a terrible master.

And I will honestly tell you that the moments of greatest joy and peace are those moments when I say "Yes" to God and His rule over my life.

In fact, in what we have seen so far, Jesus has paved the way for a worry-free and a peace-filled life, all of which makes His next words ring really, really true.

A Worry-Free Life (vv. 25-34)

Life is More Than the Stuff of Life (vv. 25-32)

Don't worry about it

[25] "For this reason (that is, because of everything we've heard Him say today) ***I say to you, do not be worried¹⁰ about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"***

There may be pathologies that get more press and that are more sensational than worry, but there are none that are more debilitating than worry. So, reasonably, Jesus says, "*Don't worry.*"

Now, if you have a bent toward worry those words might ring a little bit hollow, sort of like the old Bob Newhart skit.

In this skit, Newhart played the role of a counselor who met with a woman who was struggling with an overwhelming anxiety. She lived in fear of buried alive in a box. His counsel - cost, \$5; time 5 minutes - consisted of two simple words, shouted at the top of his lungs: "**STOP IT!**"

It's a funny skit - unless you struggle with this particular fear. And Jesus' words "***Don't worry***" would be frustrating if that was all He had to say on the topic. But He has much more to say than "**STOP IT!**"

He has said that worry recedes as we lay up treasure in heaven, keep our eyes open to holiness, and submit to God. He has been pointing the way to a worry-free life.

But there is more and Jesus calmly reminds us here of how big and expansive life is. Life is about God and people, eternity, heaven and hell, sin and righteousness, freedom and slavery.

⁹ An attempt to serve two masters betrays, not a partial commitment to discipleship, but a commitment to idolatry.

¹⁰ Literally, "***stop being worried***", the Greek verb being present imperative.

And life is about way more than the kinds of things we often worry about, stuff like food and clothing. Let's not get all consumed by having enough or the right style of clothing or even about having enough and the right kind of food.

After all, the birds don't fret about food.

Exhibit A: Birds (vv. 26-27)

[26] "Look at the birds of the air,¹¹ that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?" [27] "And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?"

What do the birds do? They go about doing what they need to do. They don't sit on the couch expecting the worms to inch into their nests. Nor do that store up great reserves of food or nesting material. They flit around seeking food and they eat what they find. They work and it all works.¹²

To quote Jesus, **"Your heavenly Father feeds them."**

Jesus' point to us is, do what you do. Be diligent about it. Do not disregard work, but do disregard worry.

Worry doesn't accomplish anything at all. It is unfruitful. It won't add height to your stature and in fact, it shortens life.

To listen to the lesson of the birds is to go about doing what God gives you to do. You take care of what is your stewardship and then you trust God for the details of His provision.

Birds serve as Exhibit A. Exhibit B, flowers, also teach a lesson.

Exhibit B: Flowers (vv. 28-30)

[28] "And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, [29] "yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

God is so good that He covers the ground with beautiful flowers. They're not utilitarian. They don't produce anything. And they don't last much more than overnight. But these flowers are fully clothed with a rainbow's worth of color.

It is always a striking thing to be out hiking in the spring or summer and come to a secluded meadow that is covered with wildflowers. I've been surprised by bluebonnets in full bloom in February in the dry creek beds of Big Bend Ranch State Park out in West Texas.

Nobody plants or tends these flowers. And there was nobody to enjoy them before you came along - except God Himself.

Jesus - who watched over King Solomon - says that these common flowers outshine anything Solomon ever put on. Here's the punchline: **[30] "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!"**

The bottom line is that Jesus wants you to lead a worry-free life. Yes, there is a cost to that life. And everything that He has said so far and what we will hear Him say in what follows gives us the price tag of a worry-free life.

Here goes. Here is Jesus, on what we are saying if we spend our lives given to worryism. He says that lead a life of fret and fear and worry is tragic, unfruitful, debilitating - and faithless.

¹¹ Note that Jesus didn't here, use the example of animals who do store up food (squirrels, ants, bears). He picks His examples carefully.

¹² As one author put it, "God has built into His ordered creation the means by which all things are cared for."

The Faithlessness of Worry (vv. 31-32)

[31] “Do not worry¹³ then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’” [32] “For the Gentiles¹⁴ eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.”

Your Savior says that worry - about anything, even about the essentials of life - is exactly what those do who don't know God. Worry is not fitting for a child of God. Worry is a determined choice to not put faith in God.

To worry is to say that God is not - or that He isn't relevant. Worry says that our potential disasters are bigger than our God.

We don't believe any of that. We want to have nothing to do with worry because this is what we believe.

We believe that God is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. We believe that God causes all things to work together for our good, because we love God and are called according to His purpose. We believe that God is our Heavenly Father, that He is crazy about us, and that He will take us to be with Him for eternity.

It is tempting to get completely wrapped up in the stuff of life. But life is about so much more than the material stuff of life. And that is why the key to killing worry when it comes to food, clothing, shelter - and everything else - is to be completely wrapped up in God's kingdom.

Be “All in” for God and His Kingdom (v. 33)

[33] “But seek first His kingdom¹⁵ and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

¹³ This is the 2nd time Jesus says this (v. 25). He'll say it one more time. (v. 34)

¹⁴ Clearly, Jesus was speaking to Jews.

¹⁵ Note the more personal reference to the kingdom here than before. “**His/God's kingdom**” as opposed to “**the kingdom of heaven.**” (Matthew 5:3, 10, 19)

It's our memory verse for the month of October. It's a well-known verse of Scripture, one of Jesus' most recognized statements.

Now. What does it mean? What is Jesus saying when He tells us to seek God's kingdom and His righteousness?¹⁶

Here's what I believe He means.

Taken as a whole, the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' call to whole-hearted discipleship. I have nicknamed it “The Kingdom Constitution.” I look at this whole section - Matthew 5-7 - as Jesus describing what our lives will look like when we are following Him, submitting to Him.

“**Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness**” is to strive to live Jesus' way. It's this:

- Live out the Beatitudes - from poor in spirit to persecution.
- Be salt and light for God.
- Fight against anger and lust.
- Love, turning the other cheek and forgiving enemies.
- It's to give to the poor, pray like crazy, and fast for God alone.

That's seeking the kingdom. It's the path to a life of transcendent meaning and purpose and it's the antidote to a life of worry.

There is no better life than the life that is consumed with following Jesus. Half-time discipleship wastes half of a life. To whatever extent you have started following Jesus, you have tasted the kingdom way. Don't be satisfied with a taste. Enjoy the whole banquet that comes with the passionate pursuit of a life-changing relationship with God.

When this pursuit is the priority of your life (“**Seek first...**”) Jesus says that “**all these things**” (stuff like food and clothing) **will be added to you.**”

¹⁶ My understanding is that “**His righteousness**” explains (is exegetical to) His kingdom. The sense would be, “*But seek first His kingdom, that is, His righteousness (i.e. - righteous living)*”

Let me just take a minute to say a word or two about this.

It is pretty obvious that many people who are “all in” for Jesus have not only NOT received all the food that they would ever want, but have suffered greatly and have died just because they were following Jesus.

Since Jesus said earlier (5:10-12) that persecution may very well be the disciple’s lot in life, we can be sure that He anticipated that there would be times when His followers would not get all the food, shelter, clothing, money, comfort, and years of life they might enjoy.

You and I live in a fallen world. Sin and its effects are seen everywhere. What Jesus says at verse 33 needs to be taken in context of what He says elsewhere.

So, if I could give an expanded sense of what Jesus is saying, it would be something like this -

“Seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness. God will see to it that you get exactly what you need - and always let Him define what it is you need. Trust Him in this. Even when it seems like you’re not getting what you need. And in the end, I promise, you’ll see how the goodness of God was lavished on you.”

He wraps all of this up with what I think was probably a twinkle in His eye.

One Day at a Time (v. 34)

[34] “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

A couple of years ago, our daughter, Erin, lived near us for a short time after college. I was always trying to get her to exercise with me. I’d ask to join me in the garage for a workout and she’d tell me, “Tomorrow, Dad. I don’t have time today. Let’s work out tomorrow.”

Sure enough, her plan worked like a charm. “Tomorrow” never arrived. All she had to do to take care of tomorrow was refuse me for today.

Mark Twain was right. Lots and lots of the terrible stuff he anticipated would come his way never came.

You and I are given today. Deal with today. One day at a time. Trust God today. Walk with Jesus today. Be the disciple God calls you to be today. That’s your assignment and that’s enough.

Conclusion:

So. What about tomorrow is worrisome for you?

Are you tempted to worry about the upcoming elections? Lots of Americans are. You can sense that worry on every kind of media, social and unsociable.¹⁷

Are you fretting and losing sleep about job security or about a health issue? Those are important.

Are you tempted to worry about your friends and family? You love your family and you’re concerned about your aging parents, your children, your spouse, your friends’ choices. Those are big things.

But worry is pointless. Worry is debilitating. Worry paralyzes.

Jesus wants you and me free from worry. Freedom from worry comes as we put aside materialotry and treasure heaven’s reward.

Freedom comes when we remember the birds and the flowers. There is freedom from worryism when we are “all in” for God’s great kingdom.

¹⁷ Check out a brilliant couple of minutes of video from Andy Stanley, pastor of Northpoint Church in Atlanta. <https://vimeo.com/185643357>