

**Entrance into the Kingdom of God
And the Validity of Contemporary Judaism:
Jesus' View**

We continue our study today of one of Jesus' best-known messages. His notoriety had spread throughout the land through His itinerate ministry, an unheard-of array of stunning miracles, as well as synagogue readings and declarations ("...today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," he said having read Isaiah 61:1-2a in Nazareth). Jesus' forerunner, John, announced the advent of the Kingdom of God in the person of the "Lamb of God." Jesus announced, "The time is fulfilled the kingdom of God is at hand... (Mark 1:15)."

The dominate question of the people of our Lord' was this, "How do I enter this kingdom you are declaring?" They knew it required righteousness, but where was it to be found. Are our religious leaders telling us truthfully the qualification for entrance into the kingdom? Is your "righteousness" and his "righteousness" the same?

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 - B. The Scribes and Pharisees distort religious practices, 6:1-18
 - 1. In the way they give, vv. 1-4
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 - 3. In the way they fast, vv. 16-18

Fasting was commanded only on the Day of Atonement, but during the exile regular fasts were instituted. Fasting was not a regular practice, but it was engaged upon unique occasions. It is not that the disciples fast; it is that they will fast in the future.

 - a. The wrong motive, v. 16a

As in the two previous examples, the issue is not the activity, but the ground for it (“seen of others”).

b. The wrong reward, v. 16b

c. The correct behavior, vv. 17-18a

While fasting is not prohibited, it must not be practiced in such a way as to impress others. It is to be done with a degree of privacy.

d. The promise of reward, v. 18b

Is it not comforting to know that God understands, and He cares for us?

C. The Scribes and Pharisees’ inconsistent personal practices (6:19-7:6) and ignorance of God’s Word always leads to perverted religious (6:1-18) and personal practices. Jesus picks three moral practices of the Pharisees: their attitude toward material things and hoarding (6:19-24), their lack of trusting God for the necessities of life (6:25-34), and their critical judgmentalism (7:1-6).

The instruction for the disciples suggests that is a general axiom. The vast majority of those who are Jesus followers will not be among the affluent, that concerns other than material things should consume them, and that they should be, nonetheless, compassionate toward those in need. God’s promise is that He will provide in His will for us.

1. Relative to materialism or selfish hoarding, vv. 19-24

a. The principle stated negatively, v. 19

Wealth in the first century was in clothing or possessions (commodities), subject to moth, mice (“rust” means to eat), and marauders. Banks did not exist; often treasure was buried.

“Breakthrough” suggests that robbers literally dug through mud and stone walls to enter storage places. The point is priorities, the value of heaven over mere earthly existence.

b. The principle stated positively, v. 20

c. The principle explained, v. 21

The tragedy of inappropriate materialism, the opposite of wise planning, is that it demands our affections. Our affections determine our actions. What we value tells us a lot about ourselves.

d. The principle illustrated, vv. 22-23

In this metaphor, the eye is equivalent to the heart (v. 21). If a person is singularly focused (eye/heart), things are fine; if the focus is divided, there will be confusion and distortion. “Bad eye” denotes selfishness; it stifles light (generosity) into one’s life. A generous person (“good eye”) is full of light (life).

- e. The principle declared, v. 24
God and materialism are each portrayed as slave-owners, not employers. A person may work for two employers but cannot be slaves to two masters. Slavery involves single-eyed devotion. The point is that the service of God must be wholehearted! Clearly, this was one of Jesus' arguments against the religious leadership.
- 2. Relative to selfish worry, vv. 25-34
"Therefore" (v. 25) indicates an implication drawn from the previous paragraph. Ownership by a good master should eliminate fear and worry; such things are the obligation of the owner. The root of anxiety is unbelief.

This passage does not forbid wise financial planning for the exigencies of life. It denounces fretting. Sensible planning and provision and worrying are not the same thing.

- a. The principle stated, v. 25a
"For this reason," connects this paragraph on anxiety and care with the previous one on focus, God or materialism. If God is the object of our focus, we need not be filled with fear.
- b. The principle argued, vv. 25b-34
 - a) From spiritual provision, v. 25b
This is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If God gives life, He can surely sustain it. He does not abandon the people who abandon themselves to the Lord.
 - b) From the worth of birds, v. 26
Again, here is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If God provides for the wren, He will care for us. Notice that he does not refer to birds as the object of fatherly care, but us ("your father"). We have a relationship of intimacy with God; birds do not. Yet, God provides for them.
 - c) From the fact of inability, v. 27
Here the argument is the foolishness of worry based on its potential for gain. It can neither get us an additional day of life or an inch of additional height (the phrase can be translated either way). God has numbered our days; we need not fret. The point is that worry obtains very little that is positive.
 - d) From flowers, vv. 28-30
 - (1) Their beauty, vv. 28-29
This is the second illustration from nature. As birds do not store up for the future, flowers are not exercised about their maintenance. Yet, they are more beautiful than Solomon.
 - (2) Their brevity, v. 30

Though elegant in beauty they were used in that day to light fires (the grass is the flowers). Here is another argument for the greater because of the provision of the lesser. The point is that God is the creator and sustainer of a beautiful universe so he can be trusted to meet the daily need of his children.

e) From unbelievers, vv. 31-32a

Those without a sovereign Lord who is covenantally committed to them should worry. We should not act like them.

f) From God's knowledge, v. 32b

Two things are stated here: believers have a "heavenly father" and He knows our needs.

g) From God's directive, v. 33

The way to put an end to worry is to focus on things far more significant. "Seek" has the idea of "to make it your priority," live life under the direction of the Lord.

h) From a day's sufficiency, v. 34

God's grace is only promised one day at a time. As God promises to care for the birds, but does not drop food into their beaks, the life experience of the saint is not a bed of roses.

Thoughts

1. Fasting does not have the prominence in the Holy Scriptures that prayer seems to have. Perhaps this is because it is a personal, private exercise often in times of great grief and exigency. When the pains of life inordinately descend upon us, it is the occasion to forego the joys of life to concentrate on prayer and meditation. Before important decisions must be made fasting is appropriate. Fasting is a form of worship, like giving and prayer, but it should not be announced. It is a private form of devotion. There are no instructions to fast regularly in the Bible, but it is a way to periodically focus on God. Have you expressed your devotion to God in this manner?
2. Living in a very materialistic, prosperity-oriented culture has its dangers. We are a culture of much, but the possessing and maintaining of material status consumes us. Sadly, our value is determined by the wealth we generate, the health we possess, and good looks. There are grave dangers in it for us individually, our families, our churches, and our society. The inordinate pursuit of wealth accumulation has caused disruption and division. How has wealth been a detriment in the life of your family, of your home? Has money created unity and love in your family, or has it brought separation and isolation?
3. Worry is one of the most prevalent sins of believers; it is the evidence of a lack of trust in God. Of all the things Jesus could have spoken about, he began with wealth accumulation and then worry; the two are often

interconnected. Worry, a manifestation of fear that unpleasantness will overtake us, should not dominate us. Our focus should be elsewhere; it should be on the kindness and generosity of God. You can only concentrate on one thing at a time. What do you fill your mind with, fretting or trust? Does not God care for the birds? Does not God provide flowers with inordinate beauty? Can you not trust him? Can you think of any reasons not to do so? If you cannot find legitimate reasons to do so, why do you continue to worry? Unless you are willing to leave a storm-tossed life, you must decide who your master is. To have a mind set on heaven and a mind set on earth is impossible.

4. The key to relief from worry is a change of focus from personal concerns to the things of the kingdom, to the things about being a disciple. Be preoccupied with the things of God mitigates against concern for ourselves. Remember in the prayer in this passage Jesus instructed us that of the six petitions, three concern the things of God and those things should be held as first-priority. Our first concern should be the honor of his name, the recognition of his character, and then kingdom and purposes. If we “seek first his kingdom,” we need not worry and fret because we have the promise of God that he will provide for us.