

Matthew 6:24–34
15h Sun. after Trinity
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
September 17, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Jesus says: “Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow.” This is a foundational principle of Christianity. The God of grace is the same God who rules over creation. God knows what you need already and He promises to take care of your physical and spiritual needs. So stop worrying. Focus on what is primary and of first importance, the things of God, and God will take care of the secondary things, like your physical needs.

The principle is clear, but no matter how often this truth is expressed, taught, and studied, even Christians tend to ask first: “What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?” Even Christians tend to get anxious about the things of this earthly life. Only then do they ask: “What must I do to be saved?” Our sinful human nature turns everything on its head by seeking first the things of this world and only then seeking out the things of God. What’s the result of these mixed up priorities? Anxiety of every kind. When you seek to serve both God and money, or anything worldly and temporal, you will anxiously pursue that which cannot be obtained. But when you serve God alone and let money and temporal things serve you, you will find peace.

“You cannot serve God and money.” The word Jesus actually uses is “Mammon.” The word “Mammon” is more encompassing than money. Mammon includes money, but it’s also more than that. Mammon means anything you possess beyond what is necessary. It means

“wealth” or “profit,” but it could include any blessings God gives us. The word “Mammon” actually comes from the name of an idol, Mammon, the Syrian god of riches. You cannot serve the true God and the false god, Mammon, at the same time. Whatever your heart trusts in, whatever you desire and hold in the highest regard, that is your god. And the most common false god in the world is Mammon. With money and possessions, with a network of family and friends, with a good reputation, and so forth comes security. Or so we think. Without money and possessions and all these things comes desperation. Far more people trust in their earthly goods, in Mammon, than in the true God who made the Heavens and the Earth.

Jesus says you cannot serve God *and* Mammon because many people try to do both and think they can get away with it. Many Christians think they can compartmentalize their life and live for God in some places, while for the most part, their life goals revolve around acquiring more wealth. They think like this: “I’ll serve God by helping others when I can, coming to church on Sunday, reading my Bible, and generally being a good person.” And then they go to work on Monday and focus on making more money, even at the expense of others. Or they spend more time counting up the totals of their different bank accounts, stocks, and investments, dreaming of all the possibilities money can bring them. They’ll hold nothing back from worldly enjoyment, but when it comes time to support the work of the Church and the things of God, they become stingy and think other people will step up and fill the gap. In the end, those who try to serve both God and Mammon end up hating God and loving Mammon, devoting themselves to material things and despising the things of God. You cannot serve God and Mammon.

Wealth and possessions are not the enemy, though. We have to be careful not to fall into that trap either. Money is not the root of all evil; the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim 6:10). It’s one thing to have possessions, and quite another thing to be possessed by them, to serve

them. Wealth and possessions are not bad in themselves. It's only when wealth and possessions are sought after and trusted more than the things of God, when we turn to serving Mammon alongside of the true God. Those who serve Mammon are constantly trying to increase their wealth, maintain it, hold onto it, and protect it at all costs. They are scared to give away anything substantial lest their pile of gold get smaller. Everything is about acquiring more and more and anything that gets in the way of that insatiable hunger becomes liable to destruction. With that kind of attitude, the more wealth acquired simply becomes a heavier burden and leads to more anxiety. The money and possessions are no longer serving the person. The person is serving the money and possessions. And the only result is hardship and anxiety.

That connection between the pursuit of Mammon and anxiety is why Jesus continues: "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" Why are we so anxious? Anxiety is what happens when we don't trust in God to take care of us from day to day. We feel it's up to us, or up to other people, or the government, our employer, or whoever else to take care of the things we need, to provide for us and for our families from day to day. We gather and gather just hoping to have enough for a rainy day, and then we become anxious about keeping what we have or maintaining our good reputation. Or we're anxious about the uncertainties of life, the things that are out of our control entirely. Or we're anxious about death, or our job, or the future of our children. And the list goes on.

Jesus points us to the birds of the air and the flowers of the field as examples of how to live anxiety free. The birds don't work like we do. They don't sow and reap. They don't gather into barns and store up for their future. Birds live from day to day, receiving their daily bread from God the Father with songs of thanksgiving. If God preserves the little sparrows from day to

day, will He not also preserve you according to His will? Worrying about everything won't add a single hour to your life. In fact, it will take away from your enjoyment of what God does give you as you waste away your life in worry. Or look at the flowers in the field? They don't worry about what to wear or how they'll be taken care of. They're not anxious about tomorrow. Yet the LORD clothes them more majestically than the mightiest kings and provides for their daily nourishment and growth. They receive everything as a gift of God.

From creation we see that God provides for all His creatures, including us, the crown of His creation. But God also gave us reason and all our senses. We know too much or we ponder too much, which ends up being our downfall into anxiety. The birds gather in their daily bread, but the life of a bird is also difficult. There are predators and dangers around every corner, they just don't always realize it. The flowers and grasses, and all the plants God made are beautiful and they sprout every year without fail. But then comes the mower to hack them down, or animals to eat them, or winter to freeze them to death. The flowers just don't realize how short their lifespan truly is. Man, on the other hand, often has an awareness of the fragility of his life. Ignorance is bliss, but man knows what's coming, even if he tries to hide from it. It's true: "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever."

If we were only left with the example of nature, we would be left in despair. Fallen nature is a cruel place. Death is always close at hand. And man knows enough to recognize this. If we only sought food, clothing, shelter, and whatever other necessities, we would be just like the animals, but worse, because we know what's coming. We would be like the Gentiles, constantly chasing and striving after what perishes and wastes away, living a futile existence. But remember, the Word of the LORD endures forever. God comes to us and gives us His

righteousness. He welcomes us into His Kingdom through Jesus Christ. In this world, everything is passing away, like the grass of the field. And we become anxious when we seek after that which perishes.

But “you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet 1:18–19). In Jesus Christ, you are freed from the futile striving after things of this world. You are forgiven for overthinking and worrying too much about the future, forgiven for neglecting what is most important and striving after what is secondary. You are freed from slavery to Mammon, slavery to the wealth and possessions that cannot bring you the wholeness you seek. You are freed from what is passing away by that which will never pass away: the Word of God, the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus rose from the dead to live forever and in Him, you too, will rise again from the dead with your body and live forever. With that promise of everlasting life before your eyes, the things that cause you anxiety and worry fade into the background.

And as Paul says: “He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?” If God took care of your greatest need, eternal life, how could He not also take care of all your bodily needs in this life until it’s your time to depart this life and go to your Savior? How could He not preserve you in body and soul to life everlasting? If he preserves the birds and the flowers, why would He not preserve you? If He provides for them, will He not also provide for you? He who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it.

Of course, anxieties will still come. Doubts will still arise in your sinful flesh. So cast all your anxieties on God, because He cares for you. He cares about your worries and your cares and

He knows your every need. Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, seek after the one thing needful—salvation in Jesus Christ—and everything you need in this life will be given to you. There's no need to be anxious. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, including you. He who saved you in Jesus Christ also promises to give you everything you need now in this life. Serve the LORD alone, and He will make everything serve for your good. Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you. May God grant us grace to take this lesson to heart. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.