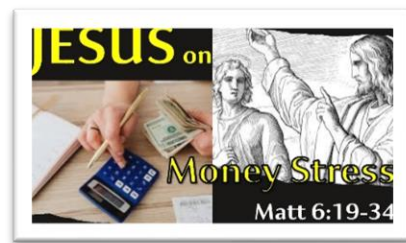


Jesus on Money Stress | the Bird University (Matt 6:19-34)



1. What Is the Common Theme in This Long Passage? MONEY!

Jesus spoke more about money than any other subject in His parables, including prayer, heaven, God, etc. Of Jesus' 38 parables, 16 deal with money! (~42%). Jesus speaks about money four times in Matthew 6 alone, and it is the largest section in the Sermon on the Mount!

- a. Money is a huge part of our life. It is a major motivating force behind all human activities. How many cars are on the road because of money? Money was invented to help the distribution of wealth and to store our labour and energy. Otherwise, we would have to go back to bartering. Money is very a helpful and necessary system, but it carries with it a dangerous deception.
- b. Jesus taught, *'The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.'* (Matt 13:22; Mark 4:19) 'The cares of this world (aion)' means 'age'. This present age in which we live has two characteristics.

- i. It is full of care (or worry & anxiety).
- ii. It is deceitful – i.e. it tricks us into thinking that this age will last forever.

This age will come to an end. The next age (the kingdom of God) will be one without worry or anxiety. Much of the cares of this world come from money or the money system - 'unrighteous mammon' (Luke 16:9).

- c. Jesus deals with two wrong attitudes toward money – greed and worry.
 - i. Covetousness (greed) – hoarding mentality
 - ii. Anxiety and fear (worry) – lack mentality.

2. Three Warnings on Greed (Covetousness):

- a. Guaranteed to Fail – You cannot keep the treasures you lay up for yourself in this life. We live in an 'unstable age'. There is no permanence in this age. No investment is secure in this world. In Jesus' days, people invested in fine clothes, grain, coins, etc. But moths made holes in the expensive clothing, rats ate the grain, and rust tarnished the coins. And all of them could be stolen. Today's sophisticated banking system is not stable. Inflation, boom and bust cycles never end. And one day our life will end. Jesus called the rich man who lived to hoard possessions a 'fool' (Luke 12:13-21). One man asked about a very rich man who just passed away, *'How much did he leave behind?'* *'Everything!'* replied the second man. It is utterly foolish to live for material possessions when our life on earth is brief.
- b. Spiritual Blindness (Myopia) – Greed and covetousness darken our soul. Our eye is the window to our soul. If our eyes continually focus on the things of the world, our spiritual sight will dim. *'The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!'* (Matt 6:22). A lot of God's people are like lamps with lights out. *Have you fallen over a chair in a dark room?* This is going to be the story of many believers who aim at laying up treasure in this life without proper consideration for life in the next age. 'Good eye' is a synonym for 'generosity.' Two men were called good in the Bible - Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50) and Joseph Barnabas (Acts 4:36). They gave away their properties, a tomb, and a field. 'Evil eye' is a synonym for stinginess that never gives anything.
- c. Divided Loyalty – In Jesus' days 'status symbol' was not driving a fancy car or living in a waterfront house, but owning a slave. Around 30% of Rome's population were slaves. And a slave cost 30 pieces of silver. Sometimes, two people put in 15 pieces of silver each to co-own a slave between them. But it never worked out - two masters fighting over rights to one slave. It is the same with God. We cannot serve both God and money. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their brand of spirituality that adhered to strict religious practices and at the same time was ruled by greed.

3. Jesus' Practical Advice

After warning the people about the danger of money, Jesus gave practical advice.

- a. The Bible does not say *money is evil, but that 'the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.'* (1 Tim 6:10) But collecting, hoarding, amassing is deeply rooted in human nature. What do we do then? Jesus tells us - to hoard our treasures in a place of guaranteed return and safety. *'Lay it up for yourself treasures in heaven.'* (Matt 6:19) Do not put all your investment in this age. It will ensure bankruptcy in the next age. Our attitude toward money reveals our faith in the next age! This is the paradox, *'The only enduring wealth that you will keep is not what you have on your deathbed, but what you have given away while you were alive.'*
- b. *'For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.'* (Luke 16:8-9). Jesus said that the unjust steward was wise because (i) he realised that he was better off spending money on people than on things; (ii) he was better off spending money for the future rather than for the present. What survives from this age to the next are the souls of the redeemed. If you invest in people so they will survive into the next age, they will thank you in eternity. £60,000 went through John Wesley's hands in his lifetime - a big sum in his days. When Wesley was told to declare his wealth for tax purposes, he reported, '7 silver spoons, some of which are in Bristol and some here in London.' The government inspector looked into Wesley's tax affairs, and found Wesley had filed his tax form accurately.

4. Another Wrong Attitude on Possession - Worry, Anxiety, Fear of NOT Having Enough

- a. Jesus mostly spoke to people who worked for the day's wage. There was no pension system, no social security, and no Medicare. They depended on the day's labour to feed their family that day. They had far less than us. 'Poor' really is a relative term. If Jesus told them worrying about lack is a sin, how much more does it apply to us? Jesus is not encouraging idleness nor is He speaking against planning for the future. He is saying, 'Don't worry about the future.' Worry and anxiety are like silent cancer that eats us from the inside.
- b. Jesus advises the believers, 'Look at the birds of the air and lilies of the field.' Learn from the Bird University!
 - (i) Worry is unnatural. Man is the only creation of God that worries. Birds are not worried about catching worms next Wednesday. They don't have a fridge to keep enough worms for two weeks. Their hunting skills have not changed for thousands of years, but they have not gone extinct. Some wilderness flowers blossom just for one day, yet they are glorious and beautiful beyond words. And they are not anxious and stressing for a bee to pollinate them to ensure their survival. Who ensures their propagation for thousands of years? God created this world, and He maintains it day by day because He cares for His creation. Jesus tells us, to God who cares for the birds and the flowers, we are far more precious than them.
 - (ii) Worry is counterproductive. *'Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?' Or 'add an hour to his life?'* (6:27) Worry can make our life shorter, but not longer. It is like paying a toll twice. First, we pay an emotional toll by worrying something bad will happen. Then we pay the toll again later if the bad thing happens. Much of what we worry about never happens, but we pay the emotional toll ahead anyway.
 - (iii) Worrying is a sin. When we worry, we are saying God is a kind of the Father who is more interested in His pets and garden than His children. *It makes us practical atheists. 'If God so clothes the grass of the field ... will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?'* Jesus is saying, we have just enough faith to get saved, but no more faith to live like a child of God. Worry for unbelievers is natural, who don't know the heavenly Father. God's covenantal love for believers means He is committed to us and is responsible for us.

5. Two Secrets for Peace

- a. Right Priority: Biological life VS Spiritual life. Anxiety comes from the sense of lack of control, and is fixated on maintaining biological life. *'What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?'* God's children must live for higher purposes – God's Kingdom and His righteousness. 'Seek first' means actively pursuing this spiritual life and making it a priority. Then Jesus promises God will take care of our biological life.
- b. Right Program: Our time is divided into 24-hour unit cycles by God. Learn to live one day at a time. God gives sufficient grace each day to deal with the troubles of that day. We are not to bring 10 years of worries forward to today. *'Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.'* (Matt 6:34) It is wisdom. And it is discipline.
- c. Phil 4:12-13: Paul has learned to be content with much or with little. Which is harder for human nature? To be content with much or little? God's grace gives us peace and contentment in both situations.