

Sermon Transcript
November 11, 2012



Kingdom Life is a Trusting Life:
Your Wallet and Worry
Matthew 6:19-34

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on November 11, 2012, at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Pastor Scott Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286.

Scripture Text
Matthew 6:19-34

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, 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 in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

²⁵ “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? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Introduction

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” That is how our passage ends this morning. This familiar verse could easily be considered a theme verse for the entire Sermon on the Mount. The *“kingdom of God”* is the message of Jesus. That is what we heard Jesus say back in Matthew 4:17 where we read *“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”* It is the same thing Mark tells us in Mark 1:14-15, *“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God.”* And what was the gospel Jesus proclaimed? Here it is. *“The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus begins his description of what life looks like in the Kingdom of God with what we have come to know as “the Beatitudes.” These are the inner qualities that the Spirit of God is forming in our hearts that cause someone to stop and say,

“I think that person is a follower of Jesus.”

“Really, what makes you say that?”

“Well look at him!” “Can’t you see it?”

“He is poor in spirit and doesn’t think he is morally superior than others.”

“He is humble enough to recognize his own shortcomings and is not reticent to say “I am sorry” and “I forgive you.”

“He is meek and humble and doesn’t always insist on his way.”

“He has a real hunger and thirst for what is right and stands for those who are oppressed and assists those who are hurting.”

“He is merciful to those around him and to those who offend him.

“He is genuine and pure in heart. He is the same in private and at home as he is in public.”

“He is a peacemaker and loves all people.”

“He is not afraid to talk about Jesus.”

“He must be a citizen of the kingdom of God. You can just see it.”

It is no accident the way Jesus begins and ends “the Beatitudes.” The first Beatitude and the last Beatitude end with the same statement. *“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . . Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* These two beatitudes serve as bookends to the rest of the Beatitudes. By saying with the first and the last beatitudes that *“theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* Jesus is saying that everything that comes between these two Beatitudes has to do with what life looks like in the kingdom of God. Consequently, this entire sermon is about life in the kingdom of God. So when Jesus says, *“But seek*

first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you,” you can apply these words to the entire Sermon on the Mount. If Jesus had a business card, this verse might be on it. *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”*

That being said, when we come to this statement this morning, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you”* it also has specific reference to the topic of our passage this morning. We mentioned last week that when Jesus comes into your life, he comes into every corner of your life. The kingdom of God invades every area of our lives. Guess where we are going to find Jesus this morning? Guess what areas of your life the kingdom of God is going to invade this morning? When Jesus says, *“seek first the kingdom of God”* guess what area of your life Jesus is specifically talking about. This morning you are going to see how the kingdom of God reaches into your wallet and challenges your worries. I call it “the double whammy.”

In this passage, you will see how our worries are often connected to our wallets. I think Jesus is saying in this passage, “If you let me be Lord of your wallet, I will be able to help you overcome your worries.” In verses 19-24, Jesus is talking about your wallet. In verses 25-34 he is talking about your worries. Notice how verse 25 begins. It begins with a word that connects the two passages together. It begins with the word *“Therefore.”* It is a word that leads to application. What is the application that comes to life if Jesus is allowed to be Lord of your wallet? Look what verse 25 says. *“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life.”*

Nothing gets the attention of an American more than the issue of “wallet and worry.” That was the focus of the whole political conversation and debate we have endured for the past year. All of our national focus has been on issues of the wallet. The psyche of our country, I don’t care who is in power, is marked with a great sense of worry. In calling us to pray for our leaders, Eric Metaxas wrote in his post election article this week, “Think about it. At home, the economy is still sluggish, to say the least. We face the so-called “fiscal cliff” and sequestration. Economists and politicians on both sides of the aisle are telling us this would be an economic disaster for the nation. And speaking of disasters, there’s the national debt.”¹ No doubt, these are causes for legitimate concern that impact all of us. But, it is also true, that these ancient words of Jesus, are not out of touch with addressing how we are to live, in the midst of this cloud of worry, many of us are living under today. When Jesus tells us three times not to be anxious, it is a command that is as relevant today as it was when he said it. How can I not be anxious at a time like this? Jesus says, “Let me get ahold of your wallet and I will get ahold of your worry.” I believe this is a timely message.

Jesus and Your Wallet

The Bible has a lot to say about your wallet. Jesus talks more about money than he talks about the topic of hell. The ledger in our checkbooks is an indicator of where our hearts are and what it is we truly treasure in life. When Jesus says in our passage, “*You cannot serve God and money*” he elevates money to being a spiritual issue, an object of worship. Colossians 3:5 equates greed with idolatry, which God hates. Now you don’t have to have money to worship it. The lottery is an example of that. And conversely, just because you have money doesn’t mean you worship it. The question is, what do you with what you have. Your wallet is a window into your heart and it is a kingdom of God issue.

According to Scripture, there are three primary purposes for money and wealth. The first purpose for money is to simply take care of your family and to not be a burden on others. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, that we are to “*aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands as we instructed you, so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.*” Work is good. Taking care of your family is good. Managing your finances so that you live within your means and are able to meet the basic needs of your family is good. It is a challenge right now with many who are unemployed and the cost of living is high. Nonetheless, the Bible champions the value of honest work for the purpose of providing for your family. That is one purpose for money.

A second purpose for money, according to Scripture, is to give to one who is need. Jesus told us that we will always have the poor among us. Well what does that have to do with me? It is unfortunate, for sure, but what does that have to do with me? It has everything to do with me. The Bible is littered with verses from the Old Testament to the New Testament with this admonition to provide for the poor. Proverbs 19:17 says “*Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.*” It sounds an awful lot like what Jesus said when he said, “*As much as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me.*” If God blesses you with resources, one of the purposes for his blessing upon you is to help others who are in need.

The Didache was an discipleship tool of the early church. Here is what the early church taught on this matter. “Thou shall not turn away from him that is in want, but thou shall share all things with thy brother, and shall not say that they are thine own.”² In 1 Clement, a second century writing of the church, it was said, “Let everyone be subject to his neighbor . . . Let the rich man provide for the wants of the poor; and let the poor man bless God, because he has given him one by whom his needs may be supplied.”³

The third primary purpose for money and wealth in the Scriptures is to use your money to advance the work of God's kingdom at home and around the world. In Philippians 4:14-19, Paul thanks the Philippians for their partnership in his ministry by sending him their financial gift. He says to them, "*I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*" When you give to the church, you are giving to the work of the advancement of the kingdom of God.

When I get my paycheck, I sit down and look at what has come in and what needs to go out during the pay period and during the month. I have this little note pad where I list everything that needs to be paid. The very first thing I list is what I have purposed to give to the church. I have been doing it all of my life, ever since my dad gave me my first allowance of a dollar. At least 10% of what I make goes to the work of God's kingdom. I don't give if I happen to have something leftover at the end. I give off of the top of what God gives me. This is part of the reason why God gives me money. It is one of the ways I worship God.

A few years ago, I came across a very interesting news article from the *Hartford Courant*. The title of the article was "Are We Stingy? Only At Church."⁴ Apparently, after a nationwide study, the Hartford area was considered to be the least generous metropolitan area in the country. Only 4.7 percent of our discretionary income was given to charity. What was surprising to the city about this study was that according to their records charitable giving was on the rise. In fact, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving was the nation's tenth largest community foundation with assets of over \$500 million. So how could we be at the bottom of the list?

Do you know what the answer is? The houses of worship in this area are not as giving as the houses of worship in other parts of the country. A study from 1996 indicates that Baptists gave 2.6% of their average income to charity. I am not picking on the Baptists. I am just pointing them out because that is who we most likely would be closest to in the survey. What is even more shocking is that those in the suburbs were more stingy and tight fisted than those in the urban centers. It was a sad commentary to see the words "stingy" and "church" together in the title of the article. But what the author was communicating is that our wallets reflect our hearts. A closed wallet reflects the condition of our hearts. It is a "stingy" heart.

If the three biblical purposes for money are to provide for your family, give to those in need and give to the advancement of the kingdom of God; that raises a few questions.

- Is this different from the way our culture views money? Yes. Next Question!
- Am I managing my money with these biblical purposes in mind? One of the reasons we have trouble giving to people in need and to the advancement of the kingdom of God through our church is because we have bought into our culture's view of money. The purpose for money in our culture is to meet our needs and live the American Dream! Has anyone ever stopped to ask if the American Dream is God's Dream? If the American Dream is the opportunity to achieve, that is a good dream. If the American Dream is to get rich so you can indulge yourself, that is not a good dream. Some of us are chasing the wrong dream and we are in debt up to our eyeballs and therefore incapable of using our resources for the good of others. This is not a statement against being rich and nor is it a statement about having things. Rather, it is a statement about living within your means and using what God has given you for his purposes.
- How can I align my wallet with Jesus and the kingdom of God?

In order to align your wallet with Jesus, you need to align your heart and your eyes with Jesus. Jesus says, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* Your wallet will follow what you treasure. We have been deceived into treasuring things that in the end fade away and do not ultimately satisfy. I am struck by the image we see in New York and New Jersey in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. Areas where entire communities were flooded, now have mounds of what amount to debris which was once a collection of valuable possessions. In a moment they are gone. And these are the things we live for! It doesn't mean it is wrong to have them. But don't sell out for them. Rather invest in things that last.

It comes back to loving God and loving people. If that is what we love and treasure, we will use what we have to invest in people. Listen to what Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:17-19. *“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.”* Lest, you are tempted to point the finger and label the rich with a certain dollar amount, compared to most of the world, we are in or closer to the top 10% than you might think.

To fix your heart, you need to adjust the focus of your eyes. Jesus goes on to say in verse 22, *“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”* Do you look at life with spiritual eyes? If your focus and gaze is upon the right things, your whole body will be good. Is your focus in life on God? God’s Word is a *“lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.”* God’s Word helps us to see the ultimate worth and beauty of God. Jesus and the kingdom of God are the *“pearl of great price.”* God is of such lasting value and worth, that everything else is worth giving up. Paul says he considers everything else to be *“rubbish”* - that is trash - compared to the value of knowing Jesus. The Psalmist says, *“One thing have I asked of the LORD, that I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life; to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.”* When your eyes are on God and when you treasure God above all else, your wallet will simply follow suit. So on one hand, the application to this message is not about giving. Rather, the application of this message is about loving God, which in turn will impact your giving. That is because it is all about worship.

In the kingdom of God, Jesus gets ahold of your wallet by getting ahold of your heart. Consequently, what you used to treasure, you no longer treasure. Instead, you now treasure God and people. The issue does not become about how many resources you have. But rather, the issue becomes how to use the resources you have been given to serve God and others. Does Jesus have your wallet? Does Jesus have your heart?

Jesus and Your Worry

Once Jesus has your wallet, you are free to let go of your worry. That is the implication of the word *“therefore”* in verse 25. If your treasure is in heaven and if your gaze is fixed on things above and if you serve God over money, then there is no need to worry. That is exactly what Jesus says. *“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? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after*

all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But 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, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Three times we are told not to be anxious. What is it about giving Jesus our wallets that alleviates us from worry? When Jesus has our wallets, we readily recognize where our security lies. When our security is in Jesus, we are free to live a life of simplicity. It is a life of trust that is truly content with what God gives me. Sometimes we find ourselves in times of plenty and that is fine. But that is also a challenge because in times of plenty I have to work at a lifestyle of simplicity. I can easily find security in what I have in the bank or my possessions. I do find it interesting though, how many wealthy people are consumed with worry. And then you go to places where there is poverty and you can find some of the most precious smiles you will ever encounter. Money doesn't buy you happiness. It looks like it does, but it doesn't. Sometimes I am in times of want. And that too is fine. In fact, that can be redemptive because it forces me into a life of simplicity and allows me the opportunity to watch God provide. *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*

Jesus begins by telling us to consider the birds. They don't sow or reap, they don't toil for their food; and yet God provides for them. Now this is not to suggest that we should not work or be diligent or responsible. That is not the point of the illustration. The point is simply this. If God supplies food for the birds, will He not also provide food for us? We are of more value than the birds of the air. It would seem rather logical, then, that God would supply our need even more so. So don't be consumed with worry. Trust God! A heart of simplicity is a heart that trusts God to meet your needs

He goes on to talk about the lilies of the field. He most likely is talking about the wild flowers of the field. When I lived in Texas, I marveled at the beauty of the wild flowers that grew along the interstate. They were absolutely beautiful. Jesus says of these flowers, *“They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”* Those beautiful flowers quickly come and just as quickly go. Are we not more important than they are? Then can we not be confident that God will care for our needs? The conclusion is this. The one who is forced into a life of simplicity is reminded that God will take care of him or her.

See, here is what a life of simplicity is designed to teach us. This is the upside of being forced into a life of simplicity. It provides us with a reality check. It reminds us of who

we are and what we are. The story of creation reminds us that all we see is derived from God. Richard Foster puts it this way. “We have no independent existence, no self-sustaining ability. All we are and all we possess is derived. . . We are not the captains of our souls nor the masters of our fates. We are part of the created order and hence totally dependent. Our posture is not one of arrogant acquisition, but of simple trust. What we have or ever will have comes from his gracious hand.”⁵ Forced simplicity causes us to realize that we are dependent creatures who find meaning and purpose in life when we live in dependence upon God. You can’t live without God. You may think you can, but that is nothing more than an illusion. The beauty of forced simplicity is that it wakes you up to your absolute dependence upon God.

But that is not all. This sovereign God loves us. This forms the basis of our trust in God. We need not worry because the One we depend upon deeply loves us. We are of more value than the birds of the air and the wild flowers of the field. Why then would we ever doubt that God would meet our most basic needs? I think one of the most insulting questions the disciples ever asked Jesus was asked at the back of the boat in the midst of the storm. Do you remember the scene? Jesus is fast asleep and the disciple are frantically trying to withstand the storm. They wake Jesus up and with a sense of panic in their voices, they ask Him, “*Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?*” How can you ever question whether Jesus cares for you? He left heaven’s glory and took on the limitations of man. He voluntarily laid down His life for us on the cruel cross and bore the wrath of the Father for our sin. How can we ever question whether God cares for us? Perhaps you wonder that in the midst of your storm. Perhaps you wonder that because you have yet to embrace a life of simplicity. Jesus promises to lovingly meet our needs. You can trust Him to do that.

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is because it did not know Him. Dear friends, now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him, purifies himself just as He is pure.” How can we question whether God loves us? The lesson you learn under forced simplicity is that this God you are called to depend upon will lovingly take care of you and meet your most basic needs. Therefore, you need not worry. You must simply trust Him.

Some of you are at a point where you need to put this to the test. You are not sure how things are going to work out and you are naturally concerned. This may be true for you personally or even when you express concern about the future economic landscape of our country. Don’t think that the words of Jesus have reached an expiration date and

don't really address our situation here. Jesus was talking to a group of people who were most likely poor and wondering where they would get their "daily bread." They lived under an oppressive political and religious leadership. I say to you, if they can trust God, you can trust God! Don't be anxious. Don't worry about tomorrow. You are being reminded that you are dependent upon God and this God loves you more than you can imagine; and He has promised to take care of you. And He will!

I once received an e-mail from a woman who found herself in a situation of forced simplicity. She wrote, "For the fourth month in a row, every dime in our bank account was withdrawn and I was four months behind in our bills. Our credit was in such bad shape I didn't dare ask for a loan. I am raising two children and was in such despair on my way home from work one night. I was afraid of not being able to feed my children. I feared losing my home and everything I had. I called out to God, "God, where is my next dollar going to come from?" I arrived at the mailbox and when I opened the mail, there was a rebate check for \$1.00. I knew that God answered my prayer. He told me I didn't have anything to worry about. "Just put your will and your life in My hands and I will take care of you."

"My daughter and I scrounged up all our "piggy-banks" in the house and we counted out the exact amount needed to pay some of our bills with three cents left over. That three cents for me was God saying, "And there will always be some left over." I then sat down and looked at my bills and decided that I could do without the cable, I didn't have to make long distance calls, we could cut down on the groceries and just go down to the basic needs. That night, at a meeting, I shared with everyone what had happened and at the end of the meeting a girl came up to me and said to me that she was in a dangerous situation and asked me if I would rent a room for her and her son. After talking about what I needed to get by, she agreed. Another prayer answered. I had resolved to trust in God, and the next day I opened my mailbox and in it was a check that would pay off all my back bills. You see, my husband was fired from his job and they sent his 401K home in a check, which I cashed and paid off the bills. I only took what I needed and gave him the rest. Another prayer answered. God really does have our backs. We just have to put all of our trust in Him."

That is the lesson simplicity teaches us; and this lesson is reality! You are dependent upon God. Trust Him! He loves you and will meet your needs. Trust Him! But that requires you to embrace the discipline of simplicity, that allows you to simply trust God to meet your needs. Do not be anxious. Rather, embrace simplicity and trust God to meet your needs. Simplicity is born out of a heart and eyes that are focused on Jesus.

Conclusion

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Let Jesus into your wallet and you will find he releases you from a life of worry. Find your security in God, not in your bank account.

I was moved by a woman who was standing next to her house that had been literally pushed off to the side of its foundation by Hurricane Sandy and just sat there in her yard. She looked into the television camera and calmly told the reporter without any sense of hesitation, “I am blessed.” The reporter responded with surprise and said, “Did you say you are blessed?” I am not sure where this woman is spiritually, but that sure smells a lot like the kingdom of God to me. Do you have the smell of the kingdom of God on you? Do you have the look of the kingdom of God on you? If you can give Jesus control of your wallet, ordering your finances around kingdom priorities, I guarantee you that when the house comes off the foundation you will be able to still say, “I am blessed.” When you lose your job or walk through difficult times, you will be able to still say, “I am blessed.” When news about economic hardship for our country looms around the corner, you will still be able to say, “I am blessed!”

May God’s kingdom touch our wallets and may you embrace a life of simplicity, resting in the promise that God will take care of you.

¹Eric Metaxas “What’s Next? Pray for our Leaders” www.breakpoint.org Nov. 7, 2012

²Richard Foster *Freedom of Simplicity* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981) 63

³Ibid., 63-64

⁴Mike Swift “Are We Stingy? Only At Church” *Hartford Courant* April 30, 2003

⁵Foster, 16