

Did Jesus Really Say That?

6. Giving Worry Away

November 29, 2020

Text: Matthew 6:19-34

I remember when I was convinced I was about to be rich! As a college student, I didn't have much money. Don't get me wrong. I never went hungry, and I always had a place to live. But I just didn't have much money most of the time. I can't say I was poor. Because I always had what I needed. I was blessed to have a significant scholarship to pay most of my tuition. I had a hand-me-down car from my grandma to get around. I had a work study job for food and gas money. But I can't say I was secure because I was living on the edge.

But as graduation approached, my fortunes were looking up. I graduated in December, and there was a lot going on in my life. I was finishing a brutal senior semester of intense projects and finals and a work study job. I was interviewing for an engineering job and traveling to site visits. Then I accepted a position in upstate New York. I was saving for a ring to get engaged that Christmas. In short, I was ready to start a new chapter in my life. But best of all, I was about to be rich! My new job was going to pay \$32,500 a year. Which was about \$30,000 more than I had been living on. It was going to be great! Here's what I did. I bought a diamond ring (using my job offer to prove my credit.) I bought a brand-new car (using my job offer to prove my credit.) I rented an apartment (using my job offer to prove my credit.) And I sailed off into the land of prosperity! It was awesome and amazing! Until I got my first paycheck. I was so convinced it was incorrect that I went to see Human Resources and patiently explained that the number on this check did not accurately reflect my new salary and wealth. And I learned about payroll tax deductions, utilities, insurance -- all about adulting -- in a very rude manner. Rather than being rich and living large, I found that in only a month, debt and stuff had become the master of my life. In one day, I went from feeling rich to feeling bankrupt. I was living my life worrying about money.

We all know what it's like to feel squeezed financially. And that's even more prevalent in 2020. The Motley Fool offers financial news and investment guidance. Earlier this year they published the results of a survey in which they found:

- Over 60% of Americans are worried about money in 2020.
- Over 50% have bought emergency supplies.
 - For most, that strained or broke their budget.
 - Another 25% wanted to buy emergency supplies but couldn't afford them.
- And nearly half have postponed a significant life event, like buying a car, getting married, or having a child.

They found Americans are deeply worried about money in 2020. For many Americans, finances are about holding on or desperately searching for more. Then scrambling to protect what we can accumulate. And that breeds worry. But what if? What if there is another way?

In the darkness of 2020, there was an amazing story about a man on a mission. Not many people have heard about Chuck Feeney. And that's by design. Because he has kept very quiet over the years. If you have ever seen Duty Free Shopping in an airport, that's where Chuck made his money and accumulated a fortune that's hard to imagine. \$8 Billion.

Many in that position -- or those of us who might dream about that position -- would do everything to hold on and enjoy it. But 40 years ago, Chuck settled on a new life goal:

to give away his entire fortune before he died. One thing Chuck got wrong was that he thought he would finish by 2016. But it took until 2020 to complete the mission. Here's a little bit more of the story. [Video shown.] That's not what culture tells us to do with money. It goes against the grain. Even though we might admire what Chuck Feeney has done, we can also justify it by saying it's easy if you have billions. I don't know. I haven't had to wrestle with that just yet. But I do know this. There is a different way to live. One that provides a healthy perspective and minimizes anxiety and worry. Not just financially, but in every area of life.

Today, we're wrapping up our deep dive into the Sermon on the Mount. This is a famous message that Jesus taught to a large crowd that is recorded in the book of Matthew. We've called this series of messages "Did Jesus Really Say That?" Because we've unpacked some pretty countercultural ideas about life.

If you have your Bible or App with you today, I'd invite you to join us in **Matthew 6**, where Jesus is giving what might seem to you like life hacks but is really wisdom. Wisdom about life. How to live with less worry and anxiety. And that seems especially timely advice for navigating 2020. Before we dive in today, let's pray.

Today, we're going to look at two passages that are back to back but that are tied tightly together for a purpose. **Matthew 6:19-24** *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

If we only read this casually, we might miss the main point. Jesus is not saying that money is bad. But He is cautioning us that money isn't everything. And when we make money everything, we can end up with nothing.

There are some examples with Bitcoin that can help us understand. Bitcoin is a digital currency. A cryptocurrency. A new way to store money. Whatever your opinion of Bitcoin, it has facilitated both great wealth and great disappointment. [Picture shown.] Here's a story from Inc. Magazine about an average guy who experienced both. British I.T. worker James Howells moved into cryptocurrency early, mining 7,500 bitcoins between 2009 and 2013. He sold the laptop he used to mine the coins but kept the hard drive just in case those keys ever turned out to be useful. During a cleanout later that year, he accidentally tossed out the drive which ended up buried in a landfill in Wales. At Bitcoin's peak, the coins on that hard drive would have been worth more than \$146 million. The municipality, which adds 50,000 tons to

the site every year, has refused Howells permission to try to dig out the drive. Somewhere in a dump in the UK is a giant pot of digital money.

This is what Jesus is warning about in **v. 19**. *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.* Jesus is trying to help us avoid pain by seeing that money is not everything. But the primary point is this: Jesus shows us where to invest. **V. 20** *But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.* So, what is a treasure in heaven? What is Jesus saying? One way to think of it is building eternal realities. Things like:

- Loving Others
- Doing Good
- Introducing Others to Jesus

The point is this: Invest in Eternal Things. When you love others, there is no taking that away. It lasts forever. When you do good for someone else -- whether that's helping a neighbor, or a random act of kindness, or investing in someone else to help them achieve a dream. Even seemingly small things can make a lifetime of difference. When you introduce someone to Jesus, it doesn't just change the rest of their life here on earth. It also changes their eternal destiny. A great way to invest in eternal things is to invest in people. Because God created them. He wants to know them. And He wants the best for them.

So, you and I have the opportunity to invest in eternal things every day. Our family, friends, neighbors, co-workers. The people where we live, work, play, and learn.

Jesus closes this section with a reminder: **v. 24** *"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.* Why does Jesus say this? It helps to remember what Jesus is after -- our hearts.

This is a truth of life -- left unchecked, money or wealth can master us. Our time, our finances, our focus, and our emotional energy. Money can easily grab our hearts. That can lead to a life that focuses financially in a way that excludes things that matter and that leads to worry.

Jesus is offering a better approach. We are given a choice of what to focus on as our priority in life. Like everything else in life, wealth and money belong in a relationship of trusting God, not just living for ourselves. Each of us has the choice: Will I use what God provides to make the world a better place? Or not?

I have a good friend who demonstrates this in many ways. He and his family have been blessed by God. And they find ways to invest in significant things. One example: They have been at work in a developing nation for some time, working on building up healthcare infrastructure. It started with a mission trip and has grown to support a prospective doctor's education, to finding a way to support and encourage prospective nurses, to funding a health clinic where these new medical professionals can serve. And in the midst of COVID, rather than shrinking back from this mission, they are instead doubling down to go faster and bigger and trying to get new testing capabilities deployed. By God's grace, they are serving God and making a big difference.

You might be thinking, but I'm not sure I can make it let alone make a difference. Jesus says: **Matthew 6:25-27** *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you, by worrying, add a single hour to your life?"* The Greek language uses the metaphor of adding a single hour to your life. The Hebrew and Aramaic use this:

Can worry add a cubit to your height? We all know that worry doesn't add value.

Instead, Jesus offers wisdom that leads to God's peace. **Matthew 6:33-34** *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.* What does it mean to seek first God's Kingdom (life when God's in charge)? It's a matter of priority, of focus, of chasing after God's best. To you, maybe that sounds too simplistic. Like if God only knew what I was facing, or if you've been through what I'm going through, you would know it's not that easy. Well, we've all lived life. And we've all faced challenges. Maybe yours are greater than mine. And I don't know what you're facing today. But I know this. Your challenges might be greater than mine. But our God is greater than everything. And God wants more than worry for you.

I believe that God has a dream for each of us. And that He plants dreams in our hearts. Dreams that are not about making us wealthy. Dreams that go beyond our comfort or pleasure. I believe that God's dreams focus on the possibilities -- the possibilities that are planted in each of us to make a difference. The possibilities that our lives are designed to make this world a better place. And those are the kinds of dreams that build God's Kingdom here on earth. But if we allow the worries of life to dominate our thinking, then we miss out on God's best. If all we think about is more, more, more, we're likely to miss what God is doing around us. And if we miss out on that, we might miss out on our purpose. If all we think about is what could go wrong, then we miss what could go right.

I've just emerged from COVID quarantine because my daughter tested positive and was sick for several days. I think it's God's blessing that she had a mild case. More like a bad cold or mild flu. And she is recovered now. That was a defining time for us. Would we choose worry or choose peace? All the statistics say that a young, healthy person will most likely be fine. But the outliers with COVID can be pretty awful. Would it run through our family, or would it be just her? Did we unintentionally pass it on to friends or family? Worry or peace? That's a microcosm of 2020 for all of us. Will we choose the world's worry or God's peace?

Each one of us has a choice today. Will we choose the world's worry or God's peace? I don't know what your potential worry is, but God does. It could be COVID, or a job, or financial pressure. Or the stress of school, or an unstable situation at work. Or family pressures, or relationship issues. The list of things we can choose to worry about is very long. But it is our choice -- your choice -- of what to do with it. I believe with all my heart that God is offering you a better way today. **Matthew 6:33-34** *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.* Do you believe God's promise? Then the question for each of us is this. Will we choose the world's worry or God's peace?

I believe that God is offering a divine exchange to us today. An invitation to exchange worry for peace. We want to help. Because financial worry is a widespread issue in 2020. And Christmas often adds stress. We are offering a free, one-day seminar with practical guidance. It's Thursday, December 3, at 6:30PM. It's a great first step to exchanging financial worry for God's peace.

But it's not just financial peace we need. It's all areas of life. Maybe you need a counselor for support. We can help connect you with that resource. But God's peace can transcend worry in every area of our lives. So now we just want to enter a time with God and allow Him to speak to us. An opportunity for some divine transactions.

Let's pray.