

Isaiah Wilson / General Adult

Sermon On the Mount / Matthew 6:1–34

Introduction

Last week we spent an entire session inside six case studies. Murder and anger. Adultery and lust. Divorce. Oaths. Retaliation. Enemy love. And underneath all six of them sat one claim we kept coming back to. Righteousness was never something you could satisfy by staying inside the lines of good behavior. The target was never behavior. The target was always God's own character, and Jesus kept moving the conversation from what your hands had done to what your heart actually wanted.

We ended in a hard place on purpose. Six case studies that climb in cost until they land on love your enemies and be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect, and nowhere to stand if you're trying to clear that bar on your own strength. And we said that was the point. The impossibility isn't a design flaw. It's what sends you looking for Jesus instead of your own effort, because He is the one who actually hit the mark we can't.

Tonight we're asking a different question. Not what does righteousness demand. We spent a whole session on that. Tonight we're asking something more specific. If it's real, where would you actually go to check.

Not the big moral moments. Not the case where somebody wrongs you and you have to decide whether to retaliate. Those moments have witnesses. Somebody's watching when you choose not to hit back. Somebody notices when you forgive publicly instead of suing somebody in open court.

Tonight we're going somewhere smaller. What do you do with your hands when you give money and nobody's counting. What do you say when you're alone in a room with the door shut and no one can hear whether you're praying or just thinking about dinner. What are you actually trusting when the money runs low and there's no audience at all, just you and the fact that you can't sleep.

Matthew 6. This is where Jesus goes looking for what's real.

One Word, Reused

Matthew 6:1 BSB

¹ “Be careful not to perform your righteous acts before men to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

Before Jesus names a single practice, giving, prayer, fasting, he states the whole point of the next eighteen verses in one sentence. Watch out for practicing your righteousness in front of people, to be seen by them.

That word, righteousness, isn't new. It's the exact same word that opened the middle section of this sermon back at 5:20. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees. We built an entire session on that word last week. And here it is again, at the start of a brand new section, doing the same job.

Jesus is picking up precisely where He left off and turning the lens somewhere new. Last week the question was what does righteousness actually require underneath the surface of the law. Tonight the question is different. Given that righteousness is a heart matter and not a performance, where does a person actually go to find out whether their own heart matches what they're claiming.

And the answer Jesus gives is uncomfortable. You find out by watching what you do when nobody's grading you.

Notice the warning that closes verse 1. If you practice your righteousness to be seen by people, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. That isn't phrased the way we might expect. Jesus doesn't say you'll lose a reward you already had. He says you won't have one. The transaction already happened somewhere else. You wanted to be seen, and you were seen. That's the whole trade, completed in full, and there's nothing left over for God to add to it.

This is the main idea for the entire chapter. Everything from here through verse 18 is one idea, applied three separate times. Giving, then prayer, then fasting. Same test, three different practices. Are you doing this because you actually believe God is watching, or because you're hoping somebody else is.

Giving in Secret

Matthew 6:2-4 BSB

² So when you give to the needy, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. Truly I tell you, they already have their full reward.

³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

The first practice Jesus names is giving to the needy. And the picture He paints is almost comic. Sounding a trumpet before you give, the way the hypocrites do in synagogues and on the streets, so that people will honor them.

Most scholars think Jesus is using exaggeration on purpose, the same way he used it back in session 3 with plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand. The point isn't whether an actual trumpet existed. The point is the destination. These people wanted to be seen giving, and they were seen giving. Jesus says they have received their reward in full. Not most of it. All of it. That's the whole transaction, closed out completely, right there in the moment of applause.

Here's what's worth noticing about that phrase, they already have their full reward. It's the language of a receipt, not a threat. Jesus isn't warning them that punishment is coming later. He's telling them the deal they wanted is the deal they got. They wanted to be honored by people. People honored them. Nothing is owed to them beyond that, because nothing else was ever the actual goal.

Then Jesus gives the corrective. When you give to the needy, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

Think about what that actually requires. This isn't just keeping your giving quiet from other people. This is a kind of secrecy so complete that Jesus pictures it hidden from your own awareness. Don't let your own giving become something you privately congratulate yourself for either.

That's a much higher bar than simply not telling anyone. It's not telling yourself either.

And your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Notice this is the first appearance of a refrain that's going to repeat two more times before this chapter is done. Your Father who sees in secret. Not your Father who eventually finds out. Not

your Father who's impressed once he hears about it secondhand. He sees it as it happens, in the room where nobody else was watching, and that's precisely why it counts.

That's the whole test for this first practice. Would you still give it if you knew for certain no one would ever find out. If the answer changes depending on who's in the room, you already know which audience you were actually giving for.

Prayer, Not a Performance

Matthew 6:5–8 BSB

⁵ And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. Truly I tell you, they already have their full reward.

⁶ But when you pray, go into your inner room, shut your door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

⁷ And when you pray, do not babble on like pagans, for they think that by their many words they will be heard.

⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Same test, new practice. Jesus moves from giving to prayer, and the audience problem hasn't changed at all.

With giving, the wrong audience was simple to picture. People standing around watching you drop money in a box. With prayer, Jesus actually gives us two different wrong audiences, and they're worth separating, because they don't look alike.

The first is the same one from the giving section. People who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, so that people will see them. Same trumpet, different instrument. The prayer itself might be full of true things about God. It might even be theologically correct from front to back. None of that matters if the actual point of saying it out loud, in that spot, at that volume, was to be noticed doing it. Jesus says it plainly. They have received their reward. Same receipt language as the giving section. The deal they wanted, they got.

The corrective matches the giving section too. Go into your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is unseen. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. That's the second appearance of the refrain. Once for giving. Now once for prayer. One more coming before this triad is finished.

But then Jesus adds something giving didn't need. A second wrong audience, and this one is stranger, because it isn't other people at all. It's God, mishandled.

When you pray, don't heap up empty phrases the way the pagans do. They think they'll be heard for their many words.

Think about what that's actually describing. Not showing off for people. Showing up for God with a stack of words, as if the right quantity, or the right formula, or enough repetition, is what finally gets the request processed. Prayer treated like a vending machine that just needs enough coins dropped in before it releases what you asked for.

That's a much easier trap to fall into than performing for a crowd. Nobody has to be watching for this one. You can fall into heaping up empty phrases entirely alone in a quiet room with the door shut, doing everything right on the outside, and still be treating God like a machine instead of a Father.

Jesus's correction here isn't, don't ask. It's actually the opposite. Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. That's not a reason to stop asking. Verse 11 is about to ask anyway, plainly and specifically, for bread. The point is that asking was never information delivery in the first place. God isn't waiting on you to explain the situation clearly enough or thoroughly enough that he finally understands what's going on. He already knows. So prayer was never a briefing. It's a relationship...

So here's where that leaves us, two sections in. Giving asks whether you'd still do it with nobody watching. Prayer asks that same question, and then asks a second one underneath it. Even alone, with no one watching at all, are you talking to a Father, or are you working a machine.

And it's right here, in the middle of that second question, that Jesus does something we've been waiting for since the very first night of this series.

Arrival at the Center

Back in session one, when we looked at how this whole sermon is built, we found something worth slowing down for. Three movements. An opening about who belongs. A closing about

the choice everyone has to make. And in between, the largest section by far, the main body, all of it bracketed by the same word, righteousness, at 5:20 and again at 7:12.

And inside that middle section, we found something even more specific. A triad. Giving, prayer, fasting. And sitting at the exact center of that middle triad, which sits at the center of the whole middle movement, which sits at the center of the whole three part sermon, is a prayer.

We said that night that if you wanted to point to the literal structural center of the most famous sermon Jesus ever preached, your finger would land right here. Not on a legal principle. Not on a warning. Not even on a promise. A prayer. And I told you we'd come back to why that matters when we got to session four.

We're here now. Matthew 6:9-13. This is the spot.

So why a prayer. Think about everything we've just walked through in the last two sections. Giving, tested by whether you'd still do it with nobody watching. Prayer itself, tested twice over, once against performing for people, once against treating God like a machine. Every single test so far has been built around one question. Are you doing this for an audience, or are you doing it because it's actually real between you and God.

Here's what makes the center of the sermon different from everything around it. A rule can be kept for an audience. You can obey a command specifically because someone's watching you obey it, and the obedience still counts as obedience on paper. A warning can be heeded for an audience too. You can avoid a specific sin loudly enough that everyone notices you avoiding it. But an address can't work that way. Our Father only means something if there's actually a Father on the other end of it. You can't perform intimacy. The category breaks the instant you try.

That's why the center of this sermon isn't a rule. It's the one thing in the entire test Jesus has been running that is structurally incapable of being faked. Everything else in verses 1 through 8 could theoretically be done for the wrong reason and still look right from the outside. This can't. The moment it's for show, it isn't this anymore.

We said something else that first night too. The center of the sermon is not a spectacle. It is an intimacy. I want you to hear that sentence again, because tonight is where it stops being something I told you and starts being something we actually do. Not a rule stated once more. A conversation, modeled once, meant to be had again and again for the rest of your life.

Some of you know these next five verses by heart. You've said them since you were a child, maybe without ever once stopping to notice you were standing at the exact center of the most famous sermon in history when you said them. Tonight, before we walk through what each line is actually doing, I want us to just say it. Together, out loud, the way it was given to us.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Now let's slow all the way down and look at what we just said.

Our Father, Hallowed Be Your Name

Matthew 6:9 BSB

⁹ So then, this is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

Notice what Jesus does before he asks God for a single thing. He doesn't open with a request. He opens with an address, and then, before anything else, a statement about God's name.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Start with the address itself, because it's easy to read past how strange it actually is. Our Father. Not our King, though He is one. Not our Judge, though He'll one day be that too. Father. This is family language, spoken by ordinary people to the God who spoke the universe into existence, and Jesus hands it to them as the correct way to begin.

Think back to what we just spent two sections establishing. Giving tested for the wrong audience. Prayer tested twice for the wrong audience. You cannot perform "Father" for a crowd. The word only works if it's true. Say it to impress somebody standing nearby, and it stops meaning what it means. Say it to a God you're privately still treating like a formula to get

right, and the word itself won't let you keep doing that, because you don't heap up empty phrases at a Father. You just talk to him.

And notice something else. It's not my Father. It's our Father. Jesus is teaching this to people praying alone, behind a shut door, with nobody else in the room, and the very first word he puts in their mouths pulls them back into a family they can't see. Every line of this prayer is going to keep doing that. Give us. Our debts. Lead us. Deliver us. Even in total privacy, even with the door shut exactly the way verse 6 told you to shut it, you are never praying as an only child. You walk into that room alone and you find out you brought everyone else with you.

Then comes the first thing actually asked for, and it isn't asked for you at all. Hallowed be Your name.

Hallowed means set apart, treated as holy, kept sacred rather than made common. Before anything is requested for the person praying, before bread, before forgiveness, before protection, the first request in this entire prayer is that God's own name would be honored as what it actually is. Not "bless me first, then we'll get to you." God's name, set apart, first.

That ordering matters. It tells you what this prayer thinks prayer actually is. Not a list of needs you're finally getting around to voicing. A relationship that starts, every time, by remembering who you're talking to before you get to what you want.

We've spent two full sections asking whether your giving and your praying can survive without an audience. Here's the answer this line gives before we've even gotten to the parts of the prayer that ask for anything. If the very first thing out of your mouth, before your own needs get named, is a request that God's name be honored, you've already answered the audience question. You weren't praying for anyone else to hear it.

Your Kingdom Come, Your Will Be Done

Matthew 6:10 BSB

¹⁰ Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Go back to session one. Before Jesus ever climbed the hill to preach this sermon, Matthew told us what He'd already been saying as He walked through Galilee. [Matthew 4:17](#). The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Not someday. Not off in the distance. Arrived, close enough to reach out and touch.

So when the people pray Your kingdom come, they are not asking God to start something that hasn't begun. The kingdom is already here. Jesus already said so, in the same book, a few chapters earlier. This request is asking for the fuller arrival of something already announced. Not the beginning of the story, the completion of a story already underway.

It would be easy to hear this line as a kind of waiting prayer. God, someday, whenever you're ready, bring your kingdom. That's not what's being asked. This is a prayer prayed by people who have already been told the kingdom is at hand, asking for more of what has already broken in.

Then the second half. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. This is the same request stated from a different angle. If the kingdom is already here, what does that actually look like once it shows up in an ordinary life. It looks like heaven's terms operating on earth's ground. Not somewhere else, not eventually. Here, now, in the specific life doing the praying.

Notice how much this connects to everything the whole sermon has been describing. Every beatitude in session two, every case study in session three, all of it is one long answer to what it looks like when God's will actually gets done on earth the way it's already done in heaven. This one line in the middle of the Lord's Prayer is asking for exactly what the entire sermon has been describing. The people aren't just reciting a phrase. They're asking for everything the last three sessions have been unpacking in detail.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

Matthew 6:11 BSB

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

After two requests about God's name and God's kingdom, the prayer turns, for the first time, to an actual physical need. Bread. Food. The most basic thing a body requires to keep functioning.

Notice the word daily. Not give us enough bread to stop worrying about bread for good. Not give us a surplus so large we never have to ask again. Daily. One day's worth, requested one day at a time, from a Father who is going to still be there tomorrow when it's time to ask again.

This line is doing something the rest of tonight is going to circle back and finish. Hold onto it, because later, when we get to Jesus telling this same crowd not to worry about what they'll eat or what they'll wear, we're going to find out that the prayer already asked for exactly that.

The people have been requesting, every time they pray this, the very thing Jesus is about to spend an entire section telling them not to manufacture through anxiety instead.

For now, just notice the posture underneath the request. Asking for daily bread rather than a lifetime supply isn't a request for less. It's a request to stay in a relationship where you need Him again tomorrow morning. A prayer for a lifetime supply would let you stop asking. A prayer for daily bread keeps you coming back to the same Father, the same way, every single day.

Forgive Us Our Debts

Matthew 6:12 BSB

¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Back in session two, when we sat with the beatitude on mercy, we corrected a misreading. Mercy in that verse isn't a transaction, mercy given in exchange for mercy received, like a deposit that earns a return. We said it was family resemblance instead. Merciful people act like the merciful Father they belong to. And we planted a marker that night, pointing forward, telling you this exact line was where we'd pick it back up.

Here it is. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Notice the shape of the request. It isn't forgive us, full stop, followed separately by a comment about how we treat other people. It's one sentence, and the second half is built directly into the asking. As we also have forgiven our debtors. The comparison isn't an afterthought tacked onto the end. It's the measuring stick built into the request itself.

Think about what that means for the person actually praying this. You cannot say this line honestly if there is somebody you are actively refusing to forgive. Not because the words would come out wrong, they'd form the same sentence either way. But because you'd be asking God to forgive you the way you have forgiven, and if the true answer to that is not at all, you have just described, out loud, exactly the kind of forgiveness you are requesting for yourself.

That should make us uncomfortable. Sit in that discomfort for a second rather than rushing past it, because Jesus isn't finished with this thought yet. He doesn't let this request stand alone as one line inside a longer prayer. He stops, right after teaching it, and comes back to explain exactly what He means.

The mercy planted back in session two as a beatitude, a description of the kind of person the kingdom produces, has now shown up again here as a debt owed and a debt forgiven, sitting at the literal center of the sermon, inside the one prayer Jesus gave his followers to pray every day. It was never a side note. It's been load bearing the whole time.

Lead Us Not Into Temptation, Deliver Us From Evil

Matthew 6:13 BSB

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

The prayer closes on a request for what's still ahead, not on relief for what's already behind.

Notice where this sits. The forgiveness just requested in verse 12 covers what's already happened. Debts already incurred, already needing to be canceled. This closing line does something different. It looks forward. Lead us not into temptation. Deliver us from evil. Even a person who just finished asking for, and receiving, real forgiveness still has to ask, in the very next breath, to be kept from what would unravel that same forgiveness tomorrow.

This prayer does not end on confidence that the hard part is over. It ends on ongoing dependence. Being forgiven doesn't graduate you out of needing protection. If anything, it's the opposite. The person who has just been forgiven a debt they couldn't pay is exactly the person with the most reason to ask not to be led somewhere that debt starts piling up again.

Two requests, short and paired. Lead us not into temptation, asking God to keep this person away from the kind of testing that would expose and exploit whatever's weak in them. Deliver us from evil, asking to be rescued from it directly, when it does show up. Neither request assumes strength on the part of the one praying. Both assume the opposite. This is a prayer that ends the way it began, with somebody who needs a Father.

And that's the prayer in full. Five requests, sitting at the exact center of the sermon, running from God's name being honored all the way to a plea for protection from what's still coming. We've now walked the whole thing, slowly, the way it deserved. Next we have to reckon with the line Jesus refused to let stand on its own. He stops right here, after teaching this prayer, and goes back to explain exactly what he meant by forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

The Debt That Comes Due

Matthew 6:14–15 BSB

¹⁴ For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive yours.

If you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Read that plainly, without softening it, and it sounds like exactly what it sounds like. Your forgiveness is on the line, based on whether you forgive other people. That is a hard sentence, and I am not going to spend the next few minutes explaining why it doesn't really mean what it says. It means what it says. What we need to get right is what it's actually saying.

Here's the wrong way to hear it, and some of you have probably heard it taught this way before. God is sitting somewhere with your forgiveness in His hand, watching to see whether you forgive the people who've wronged you, and withholding His own forgiveness from you as leverage until you comply. Forgive, and you'll earn what's being held back. That reading turns this verse into a transaction, God trading pardon for good behavior, and it would flatly contradict everything else Jesus has said. Grace is the basis. It is not for sale, and it does not get rationed out based on your performance.

So if that's not what's happening, what is.

Here's what I think this verse is actually doing. It isn't describing a condition God imposes from the outside. It's describing what's already true on the inside of a person who has genuinely received what they claim to have received. If you have actually understood the size of the debt God forgave you, an unpayable debt, canceled in full, at a cost you didn't pay, it will change what you do with the comparatively small debts other people owe you. A person who has truly grasped how much they've been forgiven, forgives. That's not a rule laid on top of salvation. That's what salvation looks like from the inside, the same claim this whole series has been making from the first night. Righteousness is not the price of the ticket in. It's the shape of a life once it's already in.

So read this verse again, and hear it as a mirror instead of a threat. Jesus isn't telling you God will change his mind about you based on your behavior. He's telling you that a refusal to forgive is evidence, not cause. If you cannot forgive somebody, that isn't God pulling something back from you as punishment. It's you showing everyone, including yourself, that

the debt God canceled never actually registered as real. You're still walking around like you owe nothing, and like everyone else owes you.

It would be easy to hear this passage, feel the weight of it for about thirty seconds, and then set it down as a hard saying that applies mostly to other people, the ones with the genuinely unforgivable situations. Don't do that. This isn't a verse about extreme cases. It's a verse about you, specifically, and whoever it is you're currently still keeping an account against. Jesus isn't asking whether you've forgiven the easy things. He's asking whether an unpaid debt is still sitting somewhere in you, right now, tonight, and what that unpaid debt says about whether you've actually understood what was paid for you.

A forgiven heart forgives. If yours doesn't, right now, toward somebody specific, that's not a minor inconsistency to smooth over next week. That's the exact question this whole series keeps asking, aimed directly at you tonight. Not what do you say you believe. What does your life actually show is true.

Fasting (6:16-18)

Matthew 6:16-18 BSB

¹⁶ When you fast, do not be somber like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they already have their full reward.

¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,

¹⁸ so that your fasting will not be obvious to men, but only to your Father, who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting.

Same test as giving, same test as prayer, now run through a different discipline entirely. Fasting is denying yourself food, or something else you'd normally have, for a set time, to focus your attention on God instead. And the hypocrites Jesus describes here had found a way to advertise it. Disfigured faces. Deliberately looking miserable, making sure anyone who passed by would know something spiritual was happening to them right now. Jesus says it plainly. They have received their reward. Same receipt language as the first two sections. They wanted to be noticed suffering for God, and they were noticed. That's the whole transaction, and nothing further is owed.

The correction matches the pattern exactly. When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen. And your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

That's the third and final appearance of the refrain tonight. Once for giving. Once for prayer. Now once for fasting. Three practices, one test, stated the same way each time, because Jesus wants it impossible to miss.

So the test stays exactly the same, just asked a third time. Would you still deny yourself this thing if nobody around you ever found out you were doing it at all.

Treasure, Eye, and Master

Matthew 6:19–24 BSB

¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, 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. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light.

²³ But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴ No one can serve two masters: 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 both God and money.

It starts with treasure.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Notice the order in that last line. Not, put your heart in the right place and your treasure will follow it. The other direction. Wherever the treasure goes, the heart follows it there. You don't get to decide where your heart lands by an act of willpower separate from your money. Your heart tracks your investment. Show me where you've actually put your resources, and I can tell you where your heart already is, whether you'd have guessed that or not.

Then Jesus does something that looks like a swerve but isn't.

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness.

This isn't a new topic dropped into the middle of a conversation about money. It's the same question asked through a different image. The eye is what lets light into the whole body. What you fix your attention on determines what the rest of you is operating by. A healthy eye floods everything with light. An unhealthy eye leaves you in darkness so complete you don't even register it as dark, because you've got nothing left to compare it to. Treasure asked where your investment goes. This asks the same thing a different way. Where does your attention go. Both questions have the same answer, whichever way you ask it.

And that's what sets up the line this whole section has been building toward.

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.

Read that as an actual claim, not a proverb to nod along with. Jesus isn't saying it's difficult to balance God and money well. He's saying it's structurally impossible to serve both, the same way it's structurally impossible to have one eye that's simultaneously healthy and unhealthy. There is no stable arrangement where you give God the majority share and let money hold a minor position underneath him. Service to a master isn't divisible that way. One of them is going to end up hated, however politely, and the other loved, however inconsistently, and which one lands in which slot won't be settled by what you'd say out loud if asked. It'll already be settled by where the treasure and the attention have been going the whole time.

That's worth being direct about, because this line is easy to hear as an aspiration instead of a wall. Seek first the kingdom, said softly enough, starts to sound like advice about priorities. Put God a little more toward the front. Jesus isn't handing out priority advice here. He's telling you there's no version of this where both arrangements coexist peacefully. One is master. The other isn't. And the honest way to find out which is which isn't to ask what you believe. It's to

ask what you've actually been serving with your treasure and your attention, this week, this month, this year.

Do Not Worry

Matthew 6:25–34 BSB

²⁵ 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 gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

²⁸ And why do you worry about clothes? Consider how the lilies of the field grow: They do not labor or spin.

²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was adorned like one of these.

³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

³² For the Gentiles strive after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.

³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Today has enough trouble of its own.

Therefore.

That word is doing real work. It ties everything that follows directly back to the master we just named. If money isn't sitting on the throne, if it's been correctly demoted to a tool instead of an owner, then something changes about how you're allowed to relate to your own need for food and clothing and tomorrow. Worry isn't a separate topic Jesus decided to cover while he had the room's attention. It's the direct consequence of getting verse 24 right or wrong.

Jesus walks through it plainly. Life is more than food. The body is more than clothing. Birds don't plant or harvest or store anything away, and the Father feeds them anyway. Flowers don't work for what they're wearing, and Solomon in all his splendor never came close to how they're dressed. If God does that for grass that gets burned in a fire by tomorrow, what does that tell you about how he intends to look after you.

Notice what Jesus is not saying here. He isn't telling this room that need doesn't exist, or that provision doesn't require anything of them, or that planning ahead is somehow beneath a person of faith. He's asking a much narrower question. Who do you think is actually responsible for the outcome. Anxiety is what happens when a person decides the job of securing tomorrow's provision belongs to them alone, and then discovers, every night, that they're not equal to a job that was never theirs to carry.

Go back to the prayer we prayed together at the center of this sermon. Give us this day our daily bread. That request was never just a line to recite. It was already asking for exactly what Jesus is describing right now. One day's provision, requested from a Father who's still going to be there tomorrow to ask again. Worry is what it looks like when a person tries to manufacture, through sheer anxious effort, the very thing they already asked for and were already promised. It's asking for daily bread with your mouth and then trying to bake a lifetime supply yourself out of fear that the request won't actually be honored.

Jesus names the alternative to that fear directly. Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

There's that word again. Righteousness. The same word that opened this whole middle section back at 5:20. The same word that opened this very chapter at 6:1. It's carried this entire series, and here it is one more time, at the close of the chapter that's tested whether it's real in secret. Seeking the kingdom first isn't a call to rearrange your priorities into a slightly better order. It's the same either or claim as the two masters line, just aimed forward instead of backward. You don't get to seek the kingdom first and worry second, the way you don't get to serve two masters at once. Whichever one is actually first is the one your life will show, whether or not it's the one you'd claim out loud.

So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

That's not permission to ignore what's coming. It's a boundary on what you're actually responsible for carrying. Today's portion, asked for daily, from a Father who has never once failed to show up for tomorrow when tomorrow arrived.

Close

We started tonight by asking a narrower question than last week's. Not what does righteousness demand. Tonight the question was smaller and harder to hide from. If it's real, where would you actually go to check.

And Jesus took us somewhere specific. Not the moments with witnesses. The moments without them. What your hands do with money nobody's counting. What you say in a room with the door shut. Whether the deepest debt you've ever been forgiven has actually changed what you do with the much smaller debts other people owe you. What you're serving with your attention and your treasure when no one's asking you to account for either one. What you actually believe about who's responsible for tomorrow, measured not by what you'd say if asked, but by what keeps you up at night.

Every single test in this chapter ran the same way. Would this survive without an audience. Would this survive without a payoff you could point to. And right at the center of all of it, we found the one thing in the whole test that was never at risk of being faked, because you cannot perform an address to a Father. You can only mean it or not mean it. Our Father in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. Five requests, holding this entire sermon together from its exact middle.

Righteousness is not the price of the ticket in. It is the shape of a life once it actually belongs to the kingdom Jesus is announcing.

Everything in this chapter has been that thesis tested against the one place performance can't reach. Not what you do in public. What you do alone.

So here is what I want you to actually do this week. Two questions, and I want you to sit with both of them honestly rather than answering quickly.

First. Is there something you do, something you give, something you pray, some way you serve, that you would stop doing, or do differently, if you knew for certain no one would ever

find out about it. If the honest answer is yes, you already know which audience you've actually been performing for.

Second. Is there a specific person you are currently still holding a debt against? Not people in general. One person, specifically, that you have not forgiven? If so, ask yourself honestly what that unpaid debt is telling you about whether you've actually understood what was canceled in you.

Don't rush past either question tonight.

Next week we close it. Two gates. Two trees. Two houses. And the marriage I told you about back on the very first night, the one I said we'd leave alone for a few weeks. We're picking it back up. Because there's a difference between a vow spoken and meant, and a vow spoken and never intended to be lived out, and next week is where that difference finally gets its answer.