

People of God, in our sermon last week, we heard how our Lord Jesus addressed the crowds about the dangers of greed. He told them the parable of the rich fool who sought to accumulate and hoard the blessings of God all for himself. His greed led to loneliness, which led to his death. Seeking to be rich for yourself, and not rich toward God, is a fool's errand, which strips one of their faith in God, and foolishly forces one to place their trust in themselves and in their possessions. In the end, this person will die, and all his wealth and possessions will be given over to another, and he will possess nothing, not even his soul.

In our passage today our Lord Jesus gives further instruction and commentary on his parable of the rich fool. But his teaching here is not for the crowds, but it is for his disciples. He calls them to greater obedience and a higher purpose for living, because their task, as apostles, is to bear their cross and follow after Christ and die. He tells them specifically later on, whoever does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Now on the surface this passage may seem to be nothing more than another teaching concerning material possessions. But our Lord Jesus is careful to connect the proper attitudes that we are to have toward material possessions to that of the greatest treasure of all, the treasure of the kingdom of God.

The focus and purpose of the life of a disciple of Jesus is to be first and foremost a single-minded pursuit of God's kingdom. But one of the things that prevents disciples from pursuing the kingdom is a divided heart and mind. Remember, Jesus taught elsewhere that "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.” The same goes for other material possessions as well, even food and drink and clothes.

You see, our God is a loving Father, he cares for us, and he knows that we have need of such things as food, drink, and clothes in order to live. So instead of worrying about these things that God promises to provide for us, we can instead focus our attentions and efforts on His kingdom.

Christ uses the ravens and the lilies as examples of the Father’s loving care for his creatures. God takes care of the ravens and gives them food. In fact, he even gifted them with great intelligence, that is, for a bird. They are very crafty creatures who can fashion tools in order to get food. How much more has God blessed us with creative minds so that we too can craft tools in order to get food. Hammers, axes, hoes, yokes, carts, tractors, barns, and storehouses, and grain bins. God has blessed us with the ingenuity and creativity to make all these things to aid us in getting food.

Thus, when Jesus tells us to consider the ravens who do not build barns and storehouses, he is not saying that we should not build barns and storehouses to store our food in. And neither is he saying that we are supposed to eat hand to mouth all the time, and not prepare for the future. Neither is Christ saying that because the lilies neither toil nor spin, that we have no need to toil or spin. Jesus is not advocating that we stop working.

His point is to show us that God cares for us more than he cares the ravens, and he cares for us more than he cares for the lilies. And since we are of more worth than to God than the Ravens and Lilies, then God will

be concerned to give us our food and clothing, and so we do not have to worry about it.

This word for “worry” or ‘anxious’ in Greek¹ here, literally means “to divide into parts, or to draw in opposite directions; to go to pieces, or be pulled apart. Divided, or distracted.” Remember, as disciples we are to be of a single mind in pursuit of the kingdom of God. But when you worry about food and clothes, making them the first priority in your life, giving them primary position of importance and purpose for your life, then you become divided.

But no man can serve two masters.

Now of course, the acquisition of Food and clothing is perfectly natural and good. God gives us the means of production and the ability to make and buy food and clothing. However, a disciple of Christ has a higher priority in life than merely just pursuing the possession of food and clothing, for the sake of living. Our lives are more than food and drink and clothing. Our lives are to be about the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. And so our food, and drink, and clothing, and our possessions are supposed to be utilized for the service of the kingdom.

As the Lord Jesus says, “And do not seek what you are to eat, and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For the nations of the world seek after

¹ 12:22 – anxious - 3309 *merimnāō* (from [3308](#) /*mérimna*, “a part, as opposed to the whole”) – properly, drawn in opposite directions; “divided into parts” (A. T. Robertson); (figuratively) “to go to pieces” because *pulled apart* (in different directions), like the force exerted by sinful *anxiety* (*worry*). Positively, [3309](#) (*merimnāō*) is used of *effectively distributing* concern, in proper relation to the *whole* picture (cf. 1 Cor 12:25; Phil 2:20). 3809 (*merimnaō*) is “an old verb for worry and anxiety – literally, to be *divided*, distracted” (WP, 2, 156). It is more commonly used in this negative sense in the NT.

such things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom and these things will be added to you.”

The difference between the pursuits of the pagan and the pursuits of the Christian are this – Pagans worry and are anxious about where they are to get food and drink and clothing. And they give their life to the pursuit of maintaining physical life and acquiring earthly possessions. But the Christian does not worry about earthly food and drink, and clothes, and material possessions. But again, not worrying about it, does not equate to a neglect of it.

The Christian doesn't avoid food, drink, and clothing, he does not neglect them, rather he has a different relationship toward them than the pagan does. Since the Christian knows that God will provide for him everything he needs to survive, he doesn't have to worry, and he instead can focus his time, efforts, and energy, as well as his money and possessions on some other greater purpose, namely helping others to experience the blessings of the kingdom of Christ. And this eternal perspective and purpose is how we store up treasures in heaven.

As Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:17-19:

17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. *18* Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, *19* storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Thus, he tells his disciples that they are to sell their possessions and give to the needy. Paul also commands the rich to give and be ready to share, for in this way they will store up treasure in heaven.

Now I must spend a moment here to clarify something. There are Christian teachers who will say that in order to be a true disciple of Christ, you must follow the words of Christ here literally, and all Christians must sell all their possessions. You must divest yourself of all worldly material possessions, and give all the proceeds to the poor if you are going to be a radical follower of Christ. They teach that this is a command that all Christians in all times and places must follow to be faithful to Jesus.

I want to disagree with that interpretation. First off, Our Lord Jesus was at first speaking to his apostles and commanded them to this obedience. And we must consider why. Well, it is no small secret that the apostles all died a martyrs death for the sake of Christ, with the exception of maybe John, who might possibly have died of old age. They had a specific calling upon their lives, that not everyone shares.

Secondly, we must keep in mind that the only larger community to have taken the words of Jesus here literally was the Jerusalem Church. And why would they have done that? Our Lord taught in many places that Jerusalem was about to come under judgment, God was going to destroy it and burn the whole thing to the ground. Therefore, when Jesus told his disciples about the inevitable judgment which was to come, he was telling them that they should not invest in a city that is about to be destroyed in a generations time. That would not be wise investment. Instead, they were

to liquidate their assets, sell what belonged to them, give to the needy, and store up treasure in heaven. Invest in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Thirdly, what was the result of this literal interpretation by the broader Jerusalem Church community? For many long years this church suffered in deep poverty. Paul had to routinely take up collection for the saints in Jerusalem from other far-off churches, such as the church in Rome, and in Corinth, to support the saints, because they could not support themselves.

Thus I believe that these words then had only a literally meaning to the original 12 apostles, and maybe the 70. But the Church in general was to deduce a principle from this teaching altogether. Namely, we use our money, possession, and power, and influence, not to primarily further advance our own status and careers, but instead, to use them for the purpose of the gospel and the kingdom of God.

And thus, back to my earlier point, when we sell our possessions and give to the needy, we have full assurance that everything we give, is actually being stored up for us in heaven. We are storing up for ourselves treasures in heaven, when we use our food and drink, and money, and clothes, and possessions, even our power and influence for the sake of the kingdom of God. We are to be people whose primary concerns in all things is to benefit the cause of the kingdom of God in the world. That is the point.

When we talk about the kingdom of God what we mean is, that are acknowledging that Jesus Christ is the Lord of all things, and people, and places, and possessions. And therefore, because Jesus has all authority over all things in Heaven and earth, all our things are actually his things,

and they are to be used in such a way as to expand his influence and rule in the world, and to help others experience Christ's kingly rule in their lives.

The kingdom of God, of which Christ is Lord, is not therefore a side hobby. It is to be our main purpose. So, when you go to work and you provide money for your family to buy them food, and drink, and clothes, and to pay your mortgage, and to buy your car, and pay for your gas etc., etc., all these things are meant to assist in your primary calling, which is to seek the kingdom of God.

And so I encourage you, People of God, consider your life. Consider where you spend money, what you spend it on, why you eat, why you drink, and what clothes you wear, and ask yourself, is this to support the kingdom of God, or is it a hindrance and distraction from the kingdom of God? Am I just using these things for my own sake? Or am I making conscious decisions about what I spend my money on, so that I can advance the kingdom of God in some real way?

The same is true of your business, or even your home and family life. Do you have a family mission which is geared towards serving the kingdom of God? Or do you work and make money and buy food and clothing and other comforts and conveniences only for your own sake? Now I am not saying that it is a sin to have nice things for yourself. What I am saying is that there is a distinct difference between the person who is only concerned to buy things for themselves, and the other who is concerned to use their money and possessions to help build the kingdom of God.

The one person has their reward and pleasure here, and the other has their reward in Heaven.

Our Lord Jesus teaches that wherever your treasure is, there your heart is also. So ask yourself – where is your treasure? What do you value above all things? And what are you doing to show that you value those things above others. Are those the kind of things that you are doing manifestations that you are investing for eternal rewards in the heavens? If so, then your financial goals, and the way in which you use your time, possessions, mind, body, soul, and strength, will reflect that. And if it does, you will be making an investment in Heaven that can never be lost. Because in heaven is where your heart will be, because that is where your treasure is.

But if you are investing in this temporal world, and you are concerned about your food, and clothes, and money, and possessions **for their own sake**, or rather, for your own sake, then your treasure is in them, and you have your reward. Your heart is here, on earth with your treasure. And that treasure will pass away and corrode and be destroyed.

And so in conclusion – Jesus' command that we not worry does not mean carelessness or lack of planning for the future. But it does mean that we must not make wealth and food and clothing our god. It means realizing that if God so wonderfully and beautifully cares for the lower creatures, there is no reason to think that he will abandon his very own people. It means that we can go to sleep at the end of the business day in the secure knowledge that our Father in heaven never sleeps – that the Almighty Creator and Lord of the Universe is watching over us. We should therefore try to succeed in our business. The goal of success is a necessary part of all human action. But we must never pursue these things as ends

in themselves. As Paul says, But whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, you are to do it for the glory of God. And as Jesus says, Seek first the kingdom, and all these things will be given to you.

And take comfort in knowing that it is our Heavenly father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom, so give yourself to the kingdom of God, and live for Christ in all your ventures, and in this way you will store up treasure for yourself in heaven. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Amen.