



## The Gospel of Matthew - Chapter Six

### **IV Matthew 5:1-7:29 - The Authoritative Message of the Messiah: Kingdom Life for His Disciples (First Discourse) (continues)**

#### Summary of Chapter Six

The Sermon on the Mount continues and Jesus begins this part of his teaching with a thesis statement summarising his point: do your righteousness for God to see you, not others (v.1). Jesus then illustrates his point with the examples of secret giving (vv.2-4), prayer (vv.5-15), and fasting (vv.16-18). The middle section on prayer is the longest; following accepted practices of arrangement in his day, Matthew may have inserted the Lord's Prayer from a different context.

The righteousness of the Kingdom of Heaven works out in the details of one's personal life. Jesus calls his followers to choose their master, either God or wealth, i.e. not to value possessions enough to seek them above more important aspects of life (vv.19-24), and to choose their outlook on life, either faith or worry, especially not to value possessions enough to worry about them (vv.25-34), a fault shared by many believers who rightly reject the prosperity teaching but then fail to adhere to Jesus' teaching.

Jesus' words strike at the core of human selfishness, challenging both the well-to-do, who have possessions to guard, and the poor, who wish they could acquire them. His words are so uncomfortable that even those who profess to love him and fight to defend Scripture's authority find themselves looking for ways to get around what he says.

#### **IV.c Matthew 6:1-7:12 - The development of Kingdom life in the real world**

Jesus sets forth principles for spirituality in all aspects of life: the life of faith (vv.1-18), everyday life (vv.19-34), and community relationships (Matthew 7:1-12).

#### IV.c.i Matthew 6:1-4 - Concerning Almsgiving

Giving should be as natural for the disciple of Christ as breathing. Jesus is teaching that the heart's motivation toward giving is to be right and that it is never to be done for selfish or self-seeking purposes.

<sup>1</sup> **‘Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.**

#### Matthew 6:1

Before others. Public acts of obedience are valuable and honourable, and are certainly not prohibited here for when done with the right heart motivation they bring honour to God. However, if such acts are done merely for the sake of public recognition, there will be no reward from God, which is also indicated in v.2, v.5 and v.16, i.e. *<<for they have received their reward>>*, where the public acclaim is the only recognition they will ever receive.

One of the inherent weaknesses in human faith is that some people love to show off their piety in order to gain recognition from others rather than from God, and Jesus clearly disputes the faith of those who do so: *<<How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?>>* (John 5:44).

In essence, this verse, the thesis statement for this part of the discourse, is saying that everything should be done for God alone: *<<Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God. We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's>>* (Romans 14:6-8), *<<So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God>>* (1 Corinthians 10:31), *<<And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him>>* (Colossians 3:17).

What this opening verse also confirms is that sin is not just the wrong that is done or the right that remains undone, it is also all the good things that are done with the wrong heart motivation. This is generally known as hypocrisy and seems to be particularly distasteful to God, which Jesus will show in many of the upcoming verses as well as elsewhere, including: *<<You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: “This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines”>>* (Matthew 15:7-9).

<sup>2</sup> ‘So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their

reward.<sup>3</sup> But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,<sup>4</sup> so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

#### Matthew 6:2-4

Do not sound a trumpet is another example of Jesus using rhetorical exaggeration in his teaching. However, it clearly illustrates how some people deliberately make known their piety in order to be praised by others.

Hypocrites originally referred to Greek actors who wore different masks to play various roles. Jesus criticises the religious leaders, most notably the Pharisees, for a particular form of hypocrisy: doing right things for the wrong reasons.

Matthew Henry wrote: 'The hypocrite is like the waterman, that looks one way and rows another; the true Christian like the traveller, that has his journey's end in his eye. The hypocrite soars like the kite, with his eye upon the prey below, which he is ready to come down to when he has a fair opportunity; the true Christian soars like the lark, higher and higher, forgetting the things that are beneath'.

Whenever you give alms. To give to the needy was one of the pillars of piety, but the religious leaders gave to the needy in order to be praised by others. The tragic irony was that they have received their reward of public and professional acclaim, but that was all the reward they would ever receive, for it is their reward and not God's; it represents the so-called good things in their lives: <<*But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony"*>> (Luke 16:25), as well as their fleeting consolation: <<*But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation*>> (Luke 6:24).

Such momentary human adulation precludes the satisfaction of the deep longing in people's hearts to stand approved by their Father who sees in secret. The needy are still there and the need to give still remains for all of Jesus' disciples; it will remain that way throughout the church age as a test to the church, its faith and integrity. King Solomon's words are timeless: <<*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it*>> (Proverbs 3:27).

Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing seems again to over exaggerate the need for secrecy in giving, or indeed many other acts of ministry. However, it highlights the importance of Jesus' central point that what is being done is for the glory of God alone. He will judge and he will reward all accordingly, as Paul clearly acknowledges: <<*But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgement before the*>>

*time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God>>* (1 Corinthians 4:3-5). Even though Jesus emphasises heavenly reward for serving those truly in need (vv.19-21), this should not be the motivating factor behind the giving.

#### IV.c.ii Matthew 6:5-15 - Concerning Prayer

Prayer is a pillar of Jewish piety. Public prayer, said aloud in the morning, afternoon and evening was common practice. Although those in Jerusalem would normally go up to the temple and in other towns to synagogues, many of the religious leaders would make a show of such prayer in the market places and on the street corners in order to be seen by, as well as to impress, the people.

<sup>5</sup> ‘And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

#### Matthew 6:5-6

Whenever you pray shows that Jesus makes the assumption that all of his disciples will spend time in prayer to God.

Do not be like the hypocrites. Although Jesus went on to give specific examples, his intention was probably a general one as well for there is nothing worse and more off-putting to non-believers than to witness hypocritical Christians, in whatever form they may appear. The word hypocrite occurs 18 times in the NRSVA translation, all but one of them being expressed by Jesus.

Stand and pray. Standing was the normal posture for prayer. However, kneeling to pray was also practised and usually indicated coming before God in all humility: <<*Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed*>> (Luke 22:41), and: <<*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father*>> (Ephesians 3:14). Ultimately, this will be something for all of mankind to do: <<*so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth*>> (Philippians 2:10).

Stand and pray in the synagogues. At the set time of prayer, pious Jews would stop what they were doing and pray, some discreetly, but others with pretentious display. Jesus did not condemn all public prayer, as indicated by his own prayers in public: <<*Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds*>> (Matthew 14:19), and: <<*he took the seven loaves and the fish; and*

*after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds>>* (Matthew 15:36). One's internal motivation is the central concern.

Your Father, will reward you. That reward will be something beyond human imagination and comprehension: <<*After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward">>* (Genesis 15:1 NIV), <<*But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked>>* (Luke 6:35), and: <<*Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward>>* (Hebrews 10:35).

Go into your room. This provides a secluded sanctuary that allows a believer to be alone with God, away from public gaze. It was something practiced regularly by Daniel, even in defiance of a local rule to prohibit such worship: <<*Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open towards Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him, just as he had done previously>>* (Daniel 6:10).

Shut the door. Although public prayer has great value, prayer completely away from public view allows a person, or even a group of people, to focus more exclusively on God without the distractions that a public setting may cause. God can see and hear his people when they pray in secret: <<*Nathanæel asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you'>>* (John 1:48), which indicates he was spending time studying the Scriptures alone yet Jesus still knew him, and he also knew of Paul's location in Damascus: <<*The Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying>>* (Acts 9:11).

<sup>7</sup> 'When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.

<sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

### Matthew 6:7-8

Heap up empty phrases. Pagans or Gentiles repeated the names of their gods or the same words over and over without thinking: <<*So they took the bull that was given them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, crying, 'O Baal, answer us!' But there was no voice, and no answer. They limped about the altar that they had made>>* (1 Kings 18:26), and: <<*But when they recognised that he was a Jew, for about two hours all of them shouted in unison, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'*>> (Acts 19:34). Jesus is prohibiting mindless, mechanical repetition, not the earnest repetition that flows

from the imploring heart: <<*O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever*>> (Psalm 136:1), where the refrain is repeated 25 more times; <<*And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory'*>> (Isaiah 6:3), <<*And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words*>> (Mark 14:39), and: <<*Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me*>> (2 Corinthians 12:8). What is also implied here is the danger that liturgy or even songs praising God can become mechanical rather than truly heartfelt.

It is not their many words that will make prayers acceptable to God, for it is a matter of aligning the heart to that of Christ, asking the Father in Jesus' name for the prayer request to be granted: <<*On that day you will ask nothing of me. Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you*>> (John 16:23). This is not excluding lengthy communion with God, which he probably welcomes as he does not tire as a human would; indeed Jesus prayed all night: <<*Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God*>> (Luke 6:12), but God is not impressed by the length, the eloquence or presentation of the speech. God wants the truth that is within a person's heart, which he already knows anyway, and he also knows what you need before you ask him. Solomon summed it up by writing: <<*Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few*>> (Ecclesiastes 5:2). Some of the best prayers are 'thank you' and 'God, help me'.

Do not be like them. Jesus issues a clear command to his followers not to be like the hypocrites in their prayer or any other area of life, for it is not honouring to God and damages his reputation in the world, something God rightly abhors: <<*I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes*>> (Ezekiel 36:23), and: <<*Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals – they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way; father and son go in to the same girl, so that my holy name is profaned; they lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge; and in the house of their God they drink wine bought with fines they imposed*>> (Amos 2:6-8).

### Matthew 6:9-13

In the following verses Jesus gives his disciples an example to follow when praying. The prayer commences with an invocation and has six petitions that provide proper priorities. The first three petitions focus on the pre-eminence of God, while the final three focus on personal needs in a community context. This has similarities to

the Ten Commandments, where the first four are honouring to God and the final six about appropriate treatment of other people in a way that is honouring to God.

In Luke's Gospel it records this prayer as a response to the disciples' request that Jesus teach them how they should pray: <<**He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples'**>> (Luke 11:1). Since at least the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century it has become known as 'the Lord's Prayer' but would perhaps be more suited if known as 'the disciples' prayer', with John Chapter 17 more fitting to the former title, where he prays for himself, his apostles and finally all disciples throughout the church age.

The structure of the prayer shows that the first thought should always be to praise and thank God: <<**Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament!**>> (Psalm 150:1), rather than to just ask for what is needed or simply wanted.

<sup>9</sup> 'Pray then in this way:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.

### Matthew 6:9

**Our Father.** God is the true Father of all whom he has created: <<**Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?**>> (Malachi 2:10), <<**For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring"**>> (Acts 17:28). This has further confirmation by the prophet: <<**Have you not just now called to me, 'My Father, you are the friend of my youth'**>> (Jeremiah 3:4).

**Father** is the Greek word *patēr* and would have been *Abba* in Aramaic, the everyday language spoken by Jesus: <<**He said, 'Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want'**>> (Mark 14:36), <<**For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!'**>> (Romans 8:15), <<**And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'**>> (Galatians 4:6).

*Abba* was the word used by Jewish children for their earthly fathers. However, since the term in both Aramaic and Greek was also used by adults to address their fathers, the claim that *Abba* meant Daddy is misleading and runs the risk of irreverence. Nevertheless, the idea of praying to God as **Our Father** conveys the authority, warmth and intimacy of a loving father's care, while in heaven reminds believers of God's sovereign rule over all things, including them.

The theme of heavenly Father is found throughout the OT: <<*You are children of the Lord your God. You must not lacerate yourselves or shave your forelocks for the dead*>> (Deuteronomy 14:1), <<*Do you thus repay the Lord, O foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?*>> (Deuteronomy 32:6), <<*As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him*>> (Psalm 103:13), <<*Have you not just now called to me, 'My Father, you are the friend of my youth'*>> (Jeremiah 3:4), <<*With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn*>> (Jeremiah 31:9), and: <<*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son*>> (Hosea 11:1). Jesus' disciples are invited into the intimacy of God the Son with his Father.

The concern of this first petition is that God's name would be hallowed – that God would be treated with the highest honour and set apart as holy. The word translated hallowed is also translated as sanctified or kept holy in other Scriptures but hallowed is retained here in most modern translations.

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

### Matthew 6:10

This is the second petition. Christians are called to pray and work for the continual advance of God's Kingdom on earth. The presence of God's Kingdom in this age refers to the reign of Christ in the hearts and lives of believers, and to the reigning presence of Christ in his body, the church; so that they increasingly reflect his love, obey his laws, honour him, do good for all people, and proclaim the good news of the Kingdom. Some aspects of the Kingdom will not arrive until Christ returns. Therefore, the current church age and the aspects of the Kingdom that are revealed within it are often referred to the 'now but not yet of the Kingdom'.

The third petition speaks of God's will and has further apostolic clarification: <<*Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin), so as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God*>> (1 Peter 4:1-2). This primarily means God's 'revealed will', which involves conduct that is pleasing to him as written or implied in Scripture. However, there are many aspects of God's counsel that are not known, which he may be applying on earth without the specific knowledge of his creation.

Just as God's will is perfectly experienced in heaven, Jesus expects his disciples to pray that it will be experienced on earth. The will of God is to be expressed in its fullness only when God's Kingdom comes in its final form, which will be when

Christ returns in power and great glory: <<Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven” with power and great glory>> (Matthew 24:30), <<I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience>> (Romans 8:18-25), and: <<Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while. Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years. When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea. They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them. And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever>> (Revelation 20:1-10), but it will increasingly be seen during this age as well: <<He put before them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.’ He told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened’>> (Matthew 13:31-33).

11 **Give us this day our daily bread.**

### Matthew 6:11

The fourth petition focuses on the disciples' **daily bread**, a necessity of life which by implication includes all of the believer's daily physical and spiritual needs. This **bread** is neither a loan to be paid back nor the payment for good deeds done. It is asked for and given freely. Just as God gives it freely, so those who receive it should give just as freely to others, especially but not exclusively when they have a surplus of anything.

King Solomon too recognised the wisdom of only requiring **daily bread**: <<*Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread*>> (Proverbs 30:8 NIV).

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

### Matthew 6:12

This is the fifth petition. **Forgive us our debts** does not mean that believers need to ask daily for justification, since believers are justified forever from the moment of initial saving faith: <<*Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*>> (Romans 5:1), <<*Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God*>> (Romans 5:9), <<*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*>> (Romans 8:1), and: <<*For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved*>> (Romans 10:10). Rather, this is a prayer for the restoration of personal fellowship with God when that fellowship has been hindered by sin: <<*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption*>> (Ephesians 4:30). However, if believers do not continue to ask for forgiveness of further transgressions, then their daily bread (v.11), may be feeding them as lambs being prepared for the slaughter, according to Matthew Henry.

Those who have received such forgiveness should be so moved with thankfulness toward God that they also eagerly **forgive** those who are **debtors** to them.

**Paul writes on the issue of sin as a debt owed to God:** <<*And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross*>> (Colossians 2:13-14). In the Greco-Roman world, the 'record of debt', Greek *cheirographon*, was a written note of indebtedness. To the Colossians, Paul uses this as a word picture to characterise each person's indebtedness to God because of sin. God himself has mercifully resolved this

problem for all who put their faith in Jesus by taking this note and nailing it to the Cross, where Jesus paid the debt in full. The image comes from the notice fastened to a cross by the Roman authorities, declaring the crime for which the criminal was being executed, as demonstrated at Jesus' crucifixion: <<*Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews'*>> (John 19:19).

<sup>13a</sup> And do not bring us to the time of trial,  
but rescue us from the evil one.

### Matthew 6:13

This sixth and final petition addresses the disciples' battle with sin and evil.

Do not bring us to the time of trial or lead us not into temptation. The word translated trial is the Greek *peirasmos*, and can also indicate either temptation or testing. The meaning here most likely carries the sense: <<*Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial*>> (Matthew 26:41a). Although God never directly tempts believers, for: <<*No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one*>> (James 1:13), he does sometimes lead them into situations that do test them: <<*The Lord said to Satan, 'Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life'*>> (Job 2:6), <<*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil*>> (Matthew 4:1), <<*In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials*>> (1 Peter 1:6), and: <<*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you*>> (1 Peter 4:12).

In fact, trials and hardships will inevitably come into believers' lives: <<*My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy*>> (James 1:2), for they are strengthened by them: <<*because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing*>> (James 1:3-4). Nevertheless, believers should never pray to be brought into such situations but should pray to be delivered from them, for hardship and temptation make obedience more difficult and will sometimes result in sin. Believers should pray to be delivered from temptation: <<*When he reached the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not come into the time of trial'*>> (Luke 22:40), <<*and he said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial'*>> (Luke 22:46), <<*then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement*>> (2 Peter 2:9), and: <<*Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth*>> (Revelation 3:10), and to be led in: <<*paths of righteousness*>> (Psalm 23:3b ESV).

Rescue us from the evil one or deliver us from evil. The Greek phrase *tou ponērou* can mean either evil or the evil one, namely Satan. The best protection from sin and temptation is to turn to God, thereby depending totally on his direction.

[[The final clause is not included in the NRSVA and is taken from the NASB translation for completeness]]

[[<sup>13b</sup> For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]]

### Matthew 6:13b

This ending to v.13 is evidently a later scribal addition, since the most reliable and oldest Greek manuscripts all lack these words, which is the reason why these words are omitted from most modern translations. However, there is nothing theologically incorrect about the wording, nor is it inappropriate to include these words in public prayers. King David praised God with very similar words around 970 BC: <<*Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all. And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name*>> (1 Chronicles 29:11-13).

<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; <sup>15</sup> but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

### Matthew 6:14-15

Forgive others. Jesus reemphasises the importance of forgiving others, indicating that there is a direct relationship between having been forgiven by God and the forgiveness that his disciples of necessity must extend to others: <<*Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses*>> (Mark 11:25), <<*and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you*>> (Ephesians 4:32), and: <<*Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive*>> (Colossians 3:13).

As in v.12, forgive your trespasses here refers to restoration of personal relationship with God, not to initial justification.

#### IV.c.iii Matthew 6:16-18 - Concerning Fasting

Many people fast in order to help them draw close to and focus on God, for it can help to heighten awareness of physical dependence that also points to spiritual dependence, thus clearly demonstrating a commitment to him. Various kinds of fasts were commonly practiced in OT times, although the law required only one fast a year, on the Day of Atonement. However, fasting is probably implied by the command to 'deny yourselves' as seen in Leviticus 16:29-34 and Leviticus 23:26-32.

In addition to abstaining from food, people were to humble themselves by praying, mourning and wearing sackcloth. As with giving (vv.2-4), and praying (vv.5-15), fasting is to be a matter of the heart between the believer and God.

<sup>16</sup> 'And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. <sup>17</sup> But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

#### Matthew 6:16-18

Whenever you fast. Jesus assumes that his disciples will fast. This was something the Jews had often done for a variety of reasons: <<*Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads. Then those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors*>> (Nehemiah 9:1-2), although their motives were not always selfless: <<*Say to all the people of the land and the priests: When you fasted and lamented in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted?*>> (Zechariah 7:5). One prophet shows it is a matter of the heart: <<*Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing*>> (Joel 2:12-13), while another saw it as a call for justice and righteousness: <<*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the*>>

*afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday>> (Isaiah 8:6-10). However, Jesus also acknowledged that his disciples would not fast until after his death and resurrection: <<Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people came and said to him, 'Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?' Jesus said to them, 'The wedding-guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day>> (Mark 2:18-20).*

Disfigure indicates leaving one's face unwashed and sprinkled with ashes, with the intention of publicising the physical hardships of fasting. In Jesus' day it was normal for Jews to trim their beards, wash, anoint their faces with oil and wear freshly washed clothes in public. By deliberately disfiguring their appearance they were drawing attention to their fasting and exaggerating the hardship it may cause them, thus seeking praise from others and not from God.

They have received their reward. Again, they have accepted what the world has to offer in terms of public recognition rather than waiting to receive the rewards that God would have given them when they come before him for judgement.

Put oil on your head and wash your face signify preparations to enjoy life: <<Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do. Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head>> (Ecclesiastes 9:7-8).

The sequence given by Jesus does not appear to be random but ordered. He expects his disciples to be generous in their giving (vv.1-4), then spending time in prayer (vv.5-15). Fasting was not so much a requirement but similar to the free-will offerings of the Jews, some of whom would fast monthly, some weekly, some twice a week as the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14, and some hardly ever. Jesus did not condemn the Pharisee for fasting twice a week but for the hypocrisy of his fasting for it was for his own self-esteem.

#### IV.c.iv Matthew 6:19-21 - Concerning Treasures

Jesus once again emphasises the need for utter faith in God and not in possessions. Treasure is an illustration of the things that people value the most. Jesus shows that there are the things that humans tend to value as their treasure and there are the things that are valuable to God. One may seem beneficial for the short term, i.e. the span of a human life, while the other is eternal.

<sup>19</sup> 'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal;

## Matthew 6:19

Treasures on earth refers to the human desire to accumulate items of monetary value or those that indicate social status. They have no value at all in Kingdom terms and Jesus has already indicated that disciples should pray: <<***on earth as it is in heaven***>> (v.10). Jesus is not saying that owning possessions is a bad thing or that they have no value at all. It is the attitude toward the possessions that concerns Jesus, i.e. are they owned or held in stewardship? Are they to be kept or to be shared with others in greater need? These are heart issues that test a person's faith and trust in God.

Moth, rust, thieves. These are just three illustrations as to what can occur to possessions that are accumulated during life of earth, showing they are transient and have no ultimate value as already noted. Life on earth is transient whereas Kingdom life is eternal. The illustrations are interesting in that moths and rust eat away from the outside, whereas the desire to have such possessions tends to eat away from inside a person. Again, James' words are very similar, indicating he may have witnessed Jesus' teaching here or heard about it soon afterwards: <<***Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Listen! The wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts on a day of slaughter***>> (James 5:2-5).

This is just one of many similarities between James and this discourse. There is a comparison in the supplementary material to James on the website.

<sup>20</sup> but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.

## Matthew 6:20

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven implies that people often have a choice between activities that lead to greater earthly reward in the present, as alluded to in v.2, v.5 and v.16, and those that store up greater future reward in heaven. Elsewhere in the Gospels the consequences of making the wrong choice are shown to have serious eternal outcomes: <<***For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?***>> (Mark 8:36), and: <<***But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich towards God***>> (Luke 12:20-21).

<sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

## Matthew 6:21

Throughout Scripture, the **heart** refers to the centre of one's being, involving one's emotions, reason and will. Here, Jesus is saying that if a person is willing to make a personal investment of themselves in Jesus' name, whether that is their time, money, resources or emotional energy, i.e. **your treasure**, then they will be showing they have the right **heart** for the Kingdom work they are pursuing. Or as King Solomon puts it: <<*My child, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways*>> (Proverbs 23:26). If a believer's treasure is laid up with God then his soul will be lifted up to him.

Without doubt the greatest of all the treasures to be stored up is to have one's name written in the book of life: <<*Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven*>> (Luke 10:20).

Paul provides similar teaching on this issue: <<*Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains*>> (1 Timothy 6:6-10), perhaps summarising his thoughts on the whole issue in: <<*Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth*>> (Colossians 3:2).

In essence, Jesus is not saying that the only treasure worth having is in heaven, he says that treasure of value is the Kingdom of Heaven, which can be found in this age within the faithful believer.

Living in the affluent western world causes many believers to be drawn into the culture of consumerism and holding on to what they have. They may be genuinely thankful to God for what they receive but also become fearful of losing what *they* have 'achieved'. Many evangelists, such as John Wesley and Charles Finney, have taught throughout the ages about believers relinquishing ownership and sharing what they have with the poor and needy; they have been called legalistic for doing so. When John the Baptist, Jesus and James call for the same things, it is labelled hyperbole: <<*And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?' In reply he said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise'*>> (Luke 3:10-11), <<*So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions*>> (Luke 14:33), and: <<*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?'*>> (James 2:14-16).

#### IV.c.v Matthew 6:22-23 - The Sound Eye

The eye allows a person to make sense of all that is around them. It allows light to penetrate the brain and illuminate the soul at the same time. The sound eye lets in the pure light, whereas an unhealthy eye blocks the benefits of that light, which is Christ: *<<Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life'>>* (John 8:12).

<sup>22</sup> 'The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; <sup>23</sup> but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

#### Matthew 6:22-23

The eye, which is similar to the heart in Jewish literature, is the lamp that reveals the quality of a person's inner life. A healthy eye, i.e. clear spiritual vision, suggests loyal devotion to God, i.e. your whole body will be full of light, while an unhealthy eye, i.e. impaired spiritual vision, connotes moral corruption.

Jesus used the singular version to indicate that the healthy eye should be one of single-minded devotion to God, whereas the unhealthy eye indicates greed.

Healthy is the Greek word *haplous* that also translates as generosity in some passages, e.g. *<<We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part>>* (2 Corinthians 8:1-2), and: *<<You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us>>* (2 Corinthians 9:11), which gives insight into Jesus' meaning. If the heart is indeed filled with such generosity of spirit then the outworkings of faith will be much in evidence.

If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! It is light that represents goodness of heart and spirit. If that light is itself darkness then the whole body has become spiritually bankrupt. The spirit of generosity will turn to one of self-indulgence, greed and even toward evil intent.

**This short passage can perhaps be summed up in the words of the prophet:** *<<Ah, you who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!>>* (Isaiah 5:20), or: *<<A fool will no longer be called noble, nor a villain be said to be honourable. For fools speak folly, and their minds plot iniquity: to practise ungodliness, to utter error concerning the Lord, to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied, and to deprive the thirsty of drink. The villainies of villains are evil; they devise wicked devices to ruin the poor with lying words,*

*even when the plea of the needy is right. But those who are noble plan noble things, and by noble things they stand>> (Isaiah 32:5-8).*

#### IV.c.vi Matthew 6:24 - Serving Two Masters

God calls his people to undivided loyalty. The world and its master offer a distraction to that loyalty that is in fact a barrier to faith and trust in God. Jesus teaches that a person has to choose between one or the other, and not try to have a foot in each camp.

<sup>24</sup> ‘No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

#### Matthew 6:24

Serve, Greek *douleuō*, indicates the work of a slave, not an employee. Since a slave is the sole property of one master, he must give that master exclusive service. A disciple’s loyalties cannot be divided; that is, one is either a slave to God or to wealth. James goes as far to say that anyone who pursues any worldly desires above God is committing a base sin: <<*Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God*>> (James 4:4).

The idea of serving two masters is contrary to the foregoing passage that speaks of focusing the eyes or heart on God: <<*To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens! As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until he has mercy upon us*>> (Psalm 123:1-2).

You cannot serve God and wealth. The general maxim is that no one can serve two masters let alone two gods! The word translated wealth is a Syriac word *mammon*, which can mean money but also all the treasures offered by the world, particularly those that attract people into actions to obtain it that are harmful, either to themselves, or others, or often both.

Jesus is not speaking out against wealth itself or the honest endeavour to create wealth. It is the attitude of the heart towards that wealth, the means by which it is obtained and how it is used that are the issues: <<*Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world*>> (1 John 2:15), <<*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains*>> (1 Timothy 6:10), as previously noted.

#### IV.c.vii Matthew 6:25-34 - Do Not Worry

When bad things happen in life, especially to a loved one, such as poor health or the loss of a job, it is natural for people to worry. However, there are also people who choose to worry about all sorts of things including some that have not yet happened, or that have no direct impact on the individual or those close to them. Jesus is saying that in all circumstances, God can be trusted to do what is right and that believers need to trust in him for that.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?’

#### Matthew 6:25

Therefore I tell you indicates that this is not a helpful suggestion but a commandment from the Lord for all his disciples to heed. Unnecessary worry is a distraction in life that can actually disable some people from being usefully engaged in the work they are called to do. It should also be noted that Jesus makes this statement as the comforter and healer that he is. Ultimately, those who heed this instruction will benefit the most from it.

Therefore, do not worry. If one makes the right choices, as indicated by vv.19-24, there is therefore no reason that one should be anxious. Jesus gives two ‘a fortiori’, i.e. ‘how much more’ examples: <<**look at the birds**>> (v.26), and: <<**consider the lilies**>> (v.28), to show that, since God cares even for the birds and the flowers, how much more will he care for his own chosen people.

Therefore, to worry about anything, whether it is the small things of life, i.e. what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear, or major issues of health, poverty, etc. demonstrates a lack of trust in God, who promises that he will graciously care for: <<**all these things**>> (v.33), for it is: <<**He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?**>> (Romans 8:32), and: <<**Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God**>> (Philippians 4:5-6). Ultimately, everyone who puts their hope in the Lord need not worry: <<**For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life**>> (John 3:16). Nothing else matters!

Is not life more than food. The physical and spiritual elements of a person both need nutrition but this life goes beyond that, providing one realises who the provider is: <<**So Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on**

*the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them>> (John 6:53-56).*

<sup>26</sup> 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?

### Matthew 6:26

Look at the birds of the air for God has created an environment that meets their needs and they are satisfied with that. Scripture shows that God cares for all his creation: *<<O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. These all look to you to give them their food in due season>> (Psalm 104:24-27).* Most of the harm that befalls nature comes from the works of mankind, the very part of creation that was supposed to steward the rest. Despite the damage mankind has done to the planet and their general disobedience to God, he still is prepared to meet their needs, showing just how much he values them.

**Humankind was created superior to nature and yet we can learn so much from them, if only we would choose to observe their dependence on God and the relatively carefree way they live their lives: *<<But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you>> (Job 12:7-8).* It could be argued that some fall prey in order to form part of the natural food chain, others fail to survive particularly harsh winters or summer droughts, and some species can even become extinct, but overall the majority survive and are well fed, showing that God cares for all of creation: *<<I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine>> (Psalm 50:11).* Some people may align themselves with those creatures that fall prey in nature; although for many it is their lifestyle choices that turn them into prey. It should never be forgotten that the world has more than sufficient resources to feed everyone. It is the way that mankind has chosen to distribute those resources that is the issue for those who generally suffer in need of the basics of life.**

Human beings are of more value than birds or animals: *<<So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows>> (Matthew 10:31), and: <<How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath>> (Matthew 12:12), because only humans, out of all God's creatures, are created: <<in the image of God>> (Genesis 1:27b), because God gave the human race stewardship over all the earth and all its creatures: <<God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'>> (Genesis 1:28), and because God loved human beings so much that he gave his only Son to die for their sins.*

<sup>27</sup> And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

#### Matthew 6:27

Add a single hour to your span of life. Some may argue that medical science has advanced to a degree where very skilled doctors, using amazing technology, can keep people alive for longer periods than they would have done without such skill, knowledge and inventions. However, that would be missing the point as to who it is that allows the human race to advance in the way they have, although not all achievements should necessarily be seen as advancing. God's intentions are always for good but he allows the bad to coexist alongside: <<***Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn***>> (Matthew 13:30).

<sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

#### Matthew 6:28-29

Even Solomon. King Solomon succeeded his father King David and ruled over all Israel at the height of the nation's wealth and influence: <<***All King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver – it was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon***>> (1 Kings 10:21). He had a reputation of being dressed in regal splendour. Yet Jesus acknowledges that there is much more beauty and value in creation than man truly appreciates.

<sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith?

#### Matthew 6:30

Grass was a natural source of fuel for fire and a common biblical metaphor for human frailty: <<***Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers, for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb***>> (Psalm 37:1-2), and: <<***My heart is stricken and withered like grass; I am too wasted to eat my bread***>> (Psalm 102:4). The lilies of v.28 may be beautiful but are little more than grass in reality.

Little faith implies a deficiency rather than an absence of faith: <<***And he said to them, 'Why are you afraid, you of little faith?' Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm***>> (Matthew 8:26).

<sup>31</sup> Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” <sup>32</sup> For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

### Matthew 6:31-32

The fact that your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things should be sufficient for people not to worry over the smaller things in life. Jesus notes the choice is simple: <<*there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her*>> (Luke 10:42), for she chose to sit at the feet of her Lord and listen. Here, Jesus is not condemning people for recognising their basic needs, and where people are living in extreme drought conditions or in warzones, where poverty often means there are no sources of food or water, it is fully understandable that people would worry about such things. What Jesus intends here is that the people who live relatively good lives, such as the vast majority who live in the industrialised nations, should not be focusing on worldly things but should simply trust in God for their basic needs. Those who have genuine concerns can cast them upon the Lord: <<*Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you*>> (1 Peter 5:7).

It is the Gentiles who strive for all these things. Jesus was speaking to a Jewish audience who knew God and therefore should have been able to trust in him. Today, this statement would apply to those who do not know God, whether they are biologically Jewish or not. Those who do believe in God, irrespective of their ethnicity, do not need to behave in a like manner.

**It should be noted that God provides what we need and not necessarily what we want. It is promised that we will be fed not feasted. Some may see that this basic level of provision is less than expected in the culture we live in; others may view his benevolence as being far greater than the cultural norm. In reality it is a matter of perspective and expectation.**

<sup>33</sup> But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

### Matthew 6:33

Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Jesus comes to the focus of his main argument by setting the priority for all of human life: <<*Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord*>> (Hebrews 12:14). Those who seek the Kingdom of God above all else will have all their needs met and will then be able to know true contentment that can only be found by trusting in God as their heavenly Father.

All these things will be given to you as well. When Solomon became King over all Israel, the chosen people of God, he knew there was just one thing he needed to fulfil his calling, that was to ask God for wisdom: <<*God answered Solomon,*

*'Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked for possessions, wealth, honour, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked for long life, but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may rule my people over whom I have made you king, wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. I will also give you riches, possessions, and honour, such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have the like'>>* (2 Chronicles 1:11-12). He recognised that the best way to be content in this world was to keep focused on another world, i.e. to place his reliance on God alone. Pharaoh's advice to Joseph was perhaps prophetic: *<<Give no thought to your possessions, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours>>* (Genesis 45:20).

<sup>34</sup> 'So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.'

### Matthew 6:34

Do not worry about tomorrow, today's trouble is enough for today. Jesus is saying that people should live in the reality of their own salvation and meet whatever challenges and tests that each day brings, rather than trying to deal with issues that have not even arisen or have no direct impact on their sphere of influence. Ultimately, the people of God are not called to be their own tormentors. This does not mean that people should not plan ahead but they should accept each day as it comes: *<<Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring>>* (Proverbs 27:1), and: *<<Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.' Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes>>* (James 4:13-14).

Jesus is not saying that the worries will then simply pass away but that they can be laid upon God in prayer, asking for genuine need and, above all, for the Kingdom of God. Most of Paul's prayers and concerns fit this category: *<<And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches>>* (2 Corinthians 11:28), and: *<<For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith; I was afraid that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labour had been in vain>>* (1 Thessalonians 3:5). The part of the future that a believer must be concerned with and work toward is what God has revealed to his people and has called them to do.