

Jesus law and kingdom - worry

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Preacher: Jerome Peirson

[0:00] Can you hear me? Wasn't that last song absolutely lovely? Really lovely.! Well on Sunday evenings we've been studying the Sermon on the Mount and we've been considering! what it means to be a child of God in the kingdom of God in this world.

So we've been thinking about what does kingdom living in this fallen world look like for the child of God? If you recall we've seen that Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, it's not the way one becomes a Christian, it's not how we become saved, but actually what Christ is teaching us, it's a description of what a true disciple of Jesus Christ will look like.

Christ is primarily speaking to his disciples, he's setting forth a vision of what we are to be and what we're to become. I think Sinclair Ferguson puts it very, very well when he says this is a description of the lifestyle of those who belong to the kingdom.

So it's very much a lifestyle, it's the marks of being a Christian. So within the Beatitudes our Lord has described how blessed, meaning how favoured or how truly happy the child of the kingdom is when they are poor in spirit, so when they know their poverty, when they know their need, when they mourn for their sin, when they are meek, when they hunger and thirst for righteousness, when they show mercy and when they are peacemakers, and they're reviled and persecuted for Christ's name's sake.

Now this is really contrary, isn't it, to the world's values. If you were to reel off all those values to the world, people would think you're absolutely nuts, wouldn't they? And Phil said it, I think, on Wednesday, that this depicts the upside-down kingdom, if you like.

[1:56] It's as if Christ has taken things and it's all on its head. He then goes on to give a penetrating and probing exposition of the law following this.

We know that the Pharisees, who were the religious elites of the time, they were very, very interested in the law, but they were focused primarily on the outward and kind of superficial keeping of the law.

They were meticulous, whereas Christ, he unpacks the true meaning of what the law is and what it means. Christ's teaching, it searches our hearts, doesn't it?

It searches our motives, searches our thoughts and our minds and our affections. And I think Christ has a very high view of the law.

Often as Christians, we tend to think, well, the law, that's been and done. We don't need to deal with that anymore. But actually, what Christ is doing, he's setting the bar so high. And he's got a wonderfully high view of the law. And the Pharisees, who we seem to think have such an exalted view of the law, they don't have high enough a view of the law.

[3:04] Well, we're going to be looking at the portion of Scripture this evening in Matthew 6 from verses 25 to 34. And this evening, I want us to focus on how our law teaches us about the cure or the remedy for worry or anxiety in the ESV, which I've prepared from.

And the necessity for kingdom priorities. So I'd like us to look at, we're going to look at it in, I've got three points, basically. Firstly, Christ's compassionate and wise command.

Our Father's provision and care for his creation and his children. And thirdly, the believer's priority and goal in life. So worry, anxiety, how relevant is that for us today, as it was for the disciples all those years ago?

So, and I'm aware, being in this church for some time, many of us have very, very different temperaments. And there will be those among us who are more prone to worry. There will be those

among us who are prone to seriousness, a real concern for their lives.

And there'll probably be very good reason for that. There may be others among us who see ourselves as taking the kind of middle ground. We see ourselves as relatively balanced. We're not particularly the worrying type.

[4:22] Yet the Christian life will be punctuated by times where we are tempted to extreme bouts of anxiety and worry. That's a guarantee. Now, there may be a very rare breed among us.

I don't think there is. But there's someone that doesn't just worry about anything. The kind of happy-go-lucky, I'm cool, I'm really relaxed, I don't worry about anything. The kind of Christian hippie, let go and let God type.

Well, my hope for the first category is that this sermon is a challenge but also a comfort to you. It's applicable to the second category as well.

And if you are on the very rare unlikelihood that you are in the third category, I hope it challenges maybe your misconception of what actually Christ is saying to us this evening.

Because he does not mean a kind of let's be easy come, easy go, kind of flippant, inactive, unintentional, undisciplined attitude.

[5:27] It doesn't mean that we don't work. It doesn't mean that we don't plan for the future or consider our lives in a thoughtful and careful way. So things like saving, thinking about a pension, providing for your family, career prospects, they're all important things.

So it's not negating those things. Our God works to a plan, doesn't he? He cares about the details of our lives and he cares about the details in his creation. And he cares about order.

And we're created in his image, aren't we? So we should reflect that care in a sense. And I just want to add, it's not always wrong to feel concerned. I think about a few weeks ago, Phil was praying on a Sunday morning.

And Phil was praying for the state of the church in this nation and the state of our culture. And there was real, I think there was real heartfelt sorrow in Phil's prayer. I think there was anguish. I think there was a touch of grief when he prayed.

And I think that's wholly biblical and applicable. We think of Paul in Romans 9 when he's speaking about his fellow Jews. He says that he sorrowed with great anguish, didn't he?

[6:33] You wouldn't have gone up to him and said, oh, Paul, don't worry. So there is an appropriate care that we should have as Christians. That's by way of introduction.

So should we have a look at the passage? So verse 25. The first point, Christ's compassionate and wise command. Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.

When we see the word therefore, we need to ask ourselves, what's gone beforehand? It's really important that this is set in a context. And it will be helpful for those of us that were there last week to just consider what David was teaching last Sunday evening.

In verse 19, David unpacked for us the emptiness and ultimate futility of seeking after earthly treasures. In verse 22, he spoke about how our spiritual vision is easily darkened.

And in verse 24, he spoke to us how we need to choose between serving two masters. We have to make this choice. Are we going to serve money, stuff, material things? Or are we going to serve the eternal, infinite, enduring God?

[7:48] So we have to make this important choice. And in essence, what Christ is saying, once you have made that choice and you are going to follow God, therefore, do not worry.

Do not be anxious about your life. Now, just putting yourself in the shoes of those original hearers, what it might have been like for them, we don't know for certain, but it's highly likely that some of them would have been saying, well, it's all very well, Jesus, you saying, don't worry about stuff, about storing up treasures on earth.

But I've got little to show for my life. I don't know where my next meal's coming from. I'm living hand to mouth. I'm poor. I need to think about feeding my family. They would have had real life anxieties then.

And it's interesting, isn't it? In these verses, Christ repeats this command. Therefore, do not be anxious. He repeats it three times. And I think that highlights the significance of that.

But I wonder whether he needs to repeat that because they are really anxious. They've got much to be worried about. And what we have here, it's a negative command, a prohibition.

[8:53] But can we see Christ's tenderness in this? He's so gentle, so tender. And he knows we're prone to becoming anxious. He knows we're prone to worry and fret.

And it's lovely, isn't it? Because he knows our heart. We look in the parallel verse in Luke 12. At the end, a kind of summation, he says, of this section.

He says, fear not, little flock. There's that real tenderness, isn't it? So what does he mean by do not worry, do not be anxious? Christ here is preoccupation, a concern and focus for those lesser things of this life.

Food, clothes, material things, stuff. And we mustn't let concerns about temporal things in this life be our chief and dominating concern.

We mustn't be possessed by our possessions or enslaved to an excessive, inordinate worry. So to be anxious here refers to, R.T. France says, to a state of mind, which means to be over-concerned to such an extent that a conflict with faith arises.

[10:03] So there's a loss of trust in God. So essentially, our Lord is calling us to prioritise our life. And I think that's one of the key things that you'll hear in this sermon, the word prioritise.

So, again, as R.T. France puts it, it's to make first things first. And what in fact is meant here is by making God first. So Christ challenges, in verse 25, he challenges the futility of such thinking with a question.

It's interesting how he often uses questions to challenge us and to get us to really think about things. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

Here he's arguing from the greater to the lesser to make the point that our lives and our bodies are of infinitely more value than clothes and food.

And what he's getting at here is we really need to trust God's provision for food and clothing. As he's provided our life, he's provided our bodies. So like the previous verses, he's calling us to order and prioritise our life.

[11:09] And I think here he is addressing the entirety of life. I don't think this is just narrowed down to clothes and food. I was thinking of an illustration for this or an example.

And I think actually the Bible itself gives a very good illustration. When we consider the time in Christ's ministry when he visits Mary and Martha. We know that story well, don't we?

And he goes to Mary and Martha's home and Mary's sitting at Christ's feet. She's absorbed in his teaching. And Martha's distracted. She's in the kitchen.

She's preparing all this food. And you can feel her resentment when you read it, can't you? You can almost imagine her breathing heavily, hoping Mary will recognise that she's struggling and come in and help her.

And you think to yourself, well actually it's a good thing that she's serving Christ, isn't it? And it's not bad to be wanting to serve Christ. It's not the issue. It's not about food. And it's interesting.

[12:05] Jesus says, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion that will not be taken away from her.

So there's that kind of comparative sense of priority there, which is interesting. We think of Philippians 4. Many of you have probably already thought about this passage, the go-to passage on anxiety.

Do not be anxious for anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

That word guard is a military term. You can think of a soldier standing guard. It's almost got a kind of forceful sense to it. So we are to take our concerns, we're to take our burdens, and we're to cast them on God.

1 Peter 5 says, casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you. Now, people of God, are we taking this, this compassionate and this wise command, because Jesus knows our hearts so well, are we taking this seriously?

[13:19] Are we responding? Are we casting our cares on our Lord and Savior? My next point is our Father's provision and care for creation and his children.

Christ uses the example of God's provision for creation as an illustration to show the uselessness of worry, the unreasonableness of worry. Christ, on two occasions with these verses, gives how much more examples.

He's looking at the birds and he's looking at the lilies. And in doing so, he's arguing this time round. He was arguing from the greater to the lesser. But this time round, he's arguing from the lesser to the greater.

It's as if he's giving his disciples a bit of a theology lesson, isn't he? And there's much here, if we look a little bit deeper under the surface, that tells us about God. And I wonder if Christ, when he was walking in that kind of agrarian, rural society, he just saw nature, saw the beauty of nature, and was just plucking these lovely examples and teaching his disciples.

Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns. And yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Verse 26. This illustration shows that since God cares for even the birds, how much more, that sense of how much more, how much more is he going to care for us?

[14:44] We're created in the image of God, aren't we? I think of that text, lovely text, which says that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without your father knowing. And that intimacy and that knowledge of even the little birds.

It's quite a beautiful picture. But we're of more value than the animals. We're created in the image of God. And we've been given dominion over the earth and the creatures. But yet even further than that, as Christians, as his adopted children, are we not even more, of more value?

And I think that needs to sink in sometimes. And I struggle to really understand that in its fullness.

It's important to note here that Christ addresses God as the disciples' heavenly Father.

Now, he's not addressing God as the heavenly Father of the birds. He's specifically the heavenly Father of the disciples. And this intimate and personal use of the word Father in the New Testament.

Now, correct me at the end if I'm wrong here. In the Old Testament, the word Father is used for God. But the passages I've managed to find that tends to be more for the corporate, the nation of Israel or the kind of covenantal God.

[16:03] There are moments where Father is used for individuals. It would be quite a good exercise, actually. Look at the Old Testament. How often is Father used? But it really comes into full focus, doesn't it, in the New Testament.

And I think Matthew was written primarily for Jews. That was the gospel for the Jews. So I think that would have been really radical for them to hear God address us to heavenly Father.

Will our Father let us go without what we need? Will our Father forsake his children? Will our Father renege on his promise? He will not leave you or forsake you.

We think of the Lord's Prayer, don't we? Give us this day our daily bread. And we see in this passage so much of God's tender fatherly love and care and provision for us.

It's a very encouraging passage. Verse 27 goes on to show how anxiety can actually achieve nothing. And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his lifespan?

[17:05] The authorised version states which of you, by being anxious, can add a cubit to one's height. The ESV and NIV translates the text as adding one's hour to one's lifespan. According to the commentators, it can mean either or.

But I think ultimately it doesn't really matter because I think in essence they're saying the same thing. You come to the same conclusion, don't you? I have a preference for the ESV version because the original context is talking about worrying for your life.

So lifespan seems to fit the bill. Psalm 39 says, We see here that worrying, it won't add another moment to our life.

We need to trust our father with the length of our days. It's only God that can add to the length of our days. It doesn't matter how healthy we are, does it? And certainly it's only God that can add a cubit to our height if your preference is for that version.

Verse 28 to 30 talks about the beauty of the lilies of the field. Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they neither toil nor spin.

[18:23] So if he provides for the beauty of the flowers of the field, which are temporal, aren't they? They're passing. How much more will he provide clothing for his children?

Note the comparison to Solomon's splendor. I think that's lovely because it points us to not just mere survival, but it points us to the generous, extravagant, and bountiful, prodigal provision of God, doesn't it?

He's so good. I think it's important just to pause at this moment and just consider what this section's teaching us about our father. Our father's not merely a transcendent, high, lifted up, majestic God. He is that. And we learned that some weeks ago when Phil was preaching through Isaiah 6, and there's much in the Bible that speaks of the transcendence of God. The deists would have seen God just solely as that.

A God who kind of creates the universe and winds it up like a clock and puts it down and steps back and allows it just to do its thing. But no, no, that's not the God of the Bible, is it?

[19:34] We have a father who likes to intervene. He gets involved. And as I was preparing this, don't we sometimes, people of God, don't we act as practical deists?

Our God, the biblical God, he's both transcendent. Yes, he is high and lifted up. But he's also intimate.

He's close. He creates, yes, but he also upholds. He sustains. He governs his creation. He's in control of all things. He's also working through secondary causes.

What I mean is that he works through things. He works through nature, the laws of nature, climate conditions. He even works through man. I think because we live in a city, we don't see things maybe the way they would have seen things in an agrarian, rural society.

They would have been acutely aware. But do we see the working of God around us? Just in the little things, day-to-day things in life.

[20:37] It's striking, isn't it, how Christ draws the disciples to consider God as their father, but he's also the ruler of the universe. Notice in verse 30 how he addresses disciples as, oh, you of little faith.

An excessive concern for the things of this world can be an indicator of little faith. Now, it's important to note that he doesn't say, oh, you of no faith.

I'm really glad he says that. Little faith is still saving faith. These are the people of God. Our faith contributes nothing to salvation.

I think that's really important because sometimes you can read these passages and you can place a kind of meritorious element on the quality of faith. And I've done that myself.

And I think it's very important to understand that faith is merely what the theologians call the instrumental means. Faith is the hand that receives Christ.

[21:41] Faith is formed in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. And it's a gift to us. It's not the strength of faith, but the strength of the object, which is Christ. However, I do think we as believers, we should desire for our faith to grow, shouldn't we?

We should be desiring for our faith to be strengthened. I think here what Christ means, and it seems to be what the commentators think, is that this faith is a practical reliance on God's care and trusting God's provision for their very physical, practical needs.

But this is a challenge to us, isn't it, about insufficient faith and a lack of trust in our Father to provide for us. And we do see here, don't we, that faith, it's not just mental assent.

It's not just, I believe God, I've read the right systematic theology, I know God's attributes. But there's something about the will and the emotions that's engaged, and it's also trust.

Is it not true that when our faith is small, I know in my own life, circumstances can easily master me. When my view of God is kind of contracted, I get my priorities all wrong.

[22:54] I see God as a small thing, I'm prone to panic, pressure gets to me. I don't think the right things about God, the right thoughts about God. And I think as Christians that we should be aware of our faith and be fighting the temptation to unbelief and insufficient faith without relying on our faith as a meritorious works.

In verse 32, Christ goes on to give an illustration of the Gentiles in my version, I think in the NIV it says pagans, of those seeking after material possessions. The word pagan, it means unbeliever rather than a racial distinction.

Christ may have been looking around us, occupied Israel, it was occupied by the Romans, and he may have been looking at their pantheon of gods. The Gentiles are consumed with these things and make them the be all and end all, and how things haven't changed.

They were then and they are now. Do we not see this? David spoke so well last week about our consumer culture, and where people's self-worth is just dependent on how much you can accumulate, how much money you earn.

And they don't know a heavenly father, do they? They don't have the heavenly father, so they're prone to excessive worry about material needs of this world.

[24:16] And we see it, don't we, in people turning to alcohol, medicating, endless distractions, anything just to take their minds away from the worries. The Gentiles in those times possibly would have invoked the gods through kind of frantic and frenzied attempts to manipulate their gods.

We think of the times of Baal, and that was beforehand obviously in the old covenant, but we think of Elijah and the Baals, the gods. Their god would have been cruel and capricious.

And it made me think, isn't the god of money, isn't the god of stuff so cruel and capricious? Pagans, they manipulate God to get what they want, but as believers, we need to be trusting God to get what we need.

And then in verse 32, this lovely, lovely verse, but your heavenly father knows that you need them all. Our heavenly father knows what we need. And I think there's a challenge for us to think about. People of God, are we living differently to the pagans around us? What does our spending of money and time tell people about us? Is not the god of money, like I said, cruel and capricious?

[25:36] Coming to the third point now, the believer's priority and goal. We look at verse 33, it says, but seek further and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

So we've learned, haven't we, the Gentiles, they prioritize seeking for stuff, material, but we are to seek God's kingdom. To seek here means a continued and ongoing action.

It's not just a one-off, oh, I'm done, done now, on to the next thing. We need to be seeking all the time in our Christian walk. So what is the kingdom of God and his righteousness? Well, some weeks ago, I did a sermon on the kingdom of God and I don't plan to kind of rehash that, but simply put, it's the rule and reign of God in the sphere of redemption, in the sphere of salvation.

I don't think the kingdom here primarily means God's sovereignty over the whole creation in the created order. That's a truth, obviously, but I think here, it's in the rule and realm of God in the sphere of redemption.

It encompasses both the rule and reign of God in the here and now. Christ has come. The kingdom has been inaugurated. We are part of that kingdom, but there's a not-yet element of the kingdom, a future glorified kingdom to come when the kingdom will be consummated.

[26:52] I think he possibly means both. It's seeking God's kingdom, so there's no room for excessive and inordinate concern and worry for the things of this world.

It's seeking, as Paul says in Colossians, the things that are above, where Christ is seated, at the right hand of God, setting our minds on things that are above, not on this earth.

And what does he mean by righteousness? Seeking his righteousness entails a life of serious commitment to the type of holy living that God requires. The commentators speak of this as a righteousness which is practically worked out in the Christian life, rather the imputed, credited righteousness that we see in Romans 3.

This is an ethical righteousness, or what theologians call an imparted righteousness. So what does seeking first, the kingdom of God, and his righteousness look like for you and I, for us as a church? Well, it may mean slightly, it may look slightly differently for all of us, but I think there are some fundamentals. How are we about the business of building the church, Christ's church?

[28:05] How are we about being among the people of God, loving the people of God? How are we about things like evangelism? Now, we may not be gifted in the area of evangelism ourselves, but we can be praying for evangelism, have a heart for evangelism, supporting those who are in the business of evangelism.

The same for missions. I see so much of that in this church, actually. Discipleship, how are we thinking and feeling about wanting to see one another grow in Christ's likeness and in holiness? What about mercy and care to the poor and the weak and the vulnerable among us, those who are maybe ostracized in society, those that are deemed to be kind of at the lower echelons of society when they walk into this door?

How do they feel? What kind of love do they receive and acceptance? And I think it's helpful here just to go back to the Beatitudes, back to the start in a sense, because who were granted the kingdom of God?

Those who were poor in spirit. Who were filled? Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. So again, this points to our need to prioritize the things that are aligned with God's will and to align ourselves with his purposes and plans rather than being distracted and absorbed in our own anxieties and worries.

[29:30] So by being focused and devoted to the goal of God's kingdom, our lesser, yet they're not in unimportant needs, can be in their rightful place. God does care about the nursery costs.

He does care about your bank balance. He does care about your health needs. He cares about your clothes. But I think here it's the order of priority. Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.

Verse 34. So Christ isn't denying that there'll be troubles ahead for us, is he? And certainly for the dishonor troubles ahead. That was certainly a reality.

However, he is saying we are to trust God one day at a time. We are not to borrow trouble and kind of bring it into today and how I can do that.

We're to trust God to deal with our troubles when they arise. And I was speaking to Phil on Wednesday at the prayer meeting. Isn't it a token of God's kindness that we can't see into the future and we don't know what actually in a couple of weeks they bring?

[30:33] I think it would keel over with the pressure of knowing it. And isn't that the kindness of God? And how often can we anxiously and fearfully project our minds into what will happen tomorrow and not trust God's providence and care for us?

Again, this doesn't mean we don't plan. He's not saying that. Well, as I draw to a close, I think it's important that we consider this as such a gracious, it's such a tender and encouraging command, isn't it?

Because if you think about we seek God because he first sought us. 1 John says we love him because he first loved us. In a sense, I could have got up here and read this passage and said right, discuss, pray, and I think you all would have got it, the basic meaning of it.

In a sense, it speaks for itself. I think the most young Christian with the basic understanding would get the main points. One could say, alongside Augustine, that this is shallow enough for a child to paddle in, yet it's deep enough, isn't it, for an elephant to swim in.

I think, when I was preparing this, actually, the real challenge is not to understand what Christ requires from us, but the real challenge, I think, for us is to put it into practice.

[32:00] So, people of God, have you considered this compassion and wise command, because your Lord, he knows you, he knows your frame, he knows you're weak.

Can you see your Father's tender care in the creation, his provision in day-to-day life, and are you prioritizing your life in light of that? Amen.