One Priority (Evening Service)

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0:00] Oh, good evening, folks. My name's Aaron. If you are new here, I want you to know there's a place at St. John's for you. And come and say hi to me or Bree afterwards.

This passage, okay. I think of all of the commands of Christ, there is one in our passage today that I found one of the hardest to obey.
That's verse 25. Do not be anxious about your life. Do not be anxious about your life. I found that really hard.
And I find it hard because my baseline emotional state is anxiety. And if you're like me, you hear this and you hear Christ say, don't be anxious.
And you hear it and it doesn't necessarily help you. For me, I hear it and understanding what it's saying properly, I hear it and it just makes me feel guilty.
[1:04] Because I can't turn the anxiety off. So I go, I'm so anxious about just normal stuff. And then I feel guilty because I'm disobeying Christ.

That's what I think. So I think it's important to ask the question, is this saying here having some sort of anxiety disorder?
Is that a sin? Does that represent a lack of faith? Are you being disobedient to your Lord? And the answer is no. The anxiety here that Christ is talking about is not the type of anxiety that comes as a result of an existing mental health issue.
He's not talking about the kind of anxiety that has perhaps a biological root or is rooted in some kind of trauma. The anxiety Christ is talking about in verse 25 is the kind of anxiety and worry that comes when your heart trusts in money and possessions above everything else.
That's what the passage is about. So anxiety as a mental health problem, that's a whole other thing. And if this is a reality for you, if you have symptoms of anxiety, insomnia, palpitations, or you have these cataclysmic thoughts, you should see a counselor or a psychologist or perhaps get medication.
[2:32] Counseling and medication, these are good gifts from God. Now with that caveat there, let's get to that. Talking about that kind of anxiety, what is he talking about?

The whole passage is about money and possessions. And this is a topic that Jesus loved to talk about. You read in the New Testament, you'll see Jesus far more about greed than he does infidelity or other sexual stuff.
And yet almost no one thinks that this is an idol in their heart.
And yet it's a huge problem in the West and we are mostly blind to it. And Jesus wants to have a, you know, a come to Jesus kind of conversation with us, I think.
He wants to get real with us about this. So one of the first things he does in the passage is he tries to show us the power that money has over us.
[3:42] In verse 24, no one can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and money. Jesus is saying money can master you. It can own you.

It can be your God. Which is why you can't serve it and Jesus. You know, you have a throne in your heart. And there's only room for one on it.
And Christ says it's possible for money to be the thing. Guiding all of your decisions. Verse 22 is helpful here in understanding this.
Christ uses the analogy of a bad guy to show us the effect of money in our life. I'll remind you of the passage, verse 22. The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.
But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness? How great is the darkness?

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[4:42] I know it's quite confusing, right? But it's basically, I think, like in a room like this, there's light in this room. It's the light.

And because of the light coming into our, we can sort of navigate this space. Imagine this space is our life, right? But if your eye is not working, your whole body is in trouble, isn't it?
Because you can't navigate the space. You're bumping into things. You're hurting yourself. It's just darkness. The room can be full of light, but it's darkness to you. You exist in darkness. Money can have this immense power over us.
It can give you a bad eye. It can make your eyes bad. And that's trouble. That is trouble. You'll be in darkness. And what does this look like on the ground? What is this, like this bad eye analogy?
We take this into real life. What does it actually look like? What does the power, what kind of power does money have over our life? Practically. A few examples. Materialism has the power to get you to choose a job purely on money, doesn't it?
[5:50] That's powerful. It has the power to get people to choose profit over the safety of other people.

We all know this. Materialism and the love of money can actually change the way we look at people. If you're materialistic and you're poor, you may disdain the rich.
You look at them and you think, well, they're rich. They're probably jerks. If you're materialistic and rich, you may look down on the poor and think, well, they're probably just lazy, aren't they?
And you can look at folks that are poor and say, well, I mean, if I was in their situation, if I was born into their family and if I was born into their neighborhood, and I had the trauma that they were, I didn't care.
Hey, because I'm stronger. I would have made better decisions. I'd be rich now. The poor have nothing to teach me.
[7:08] These are all signs that your eye is bad. Your heart's been corrupted by money. Your heart is muddied. So what do we do about this? What do we do if we become materialists? What do we do if possessions and money become so important to us that they're affecting a really good chunk of our decisions in life, affecting our outlook on life?

Well, the passage does a couple of things. It's very interesting. It gives a couple of just sort of proverbial type things, like these kind of like little proverbs of common sense things. It says some quite common sense things about money.
But the big solution is the heart solution. The big solution to materialism is understanding who we are to God, and we'll talk about that in a moment. But first, let's start with these kind of quite interesting little practical things that Jesus says.
And the first one is verse 19. He says, Do not lay out for yourselves treasure on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. Trusters of money feel they have control over their lives and are safe because of their wealth.
And Jesus says, No. He says, No. You're putting a lot of trust in very fragile things. Things that could be taken from you. It's like a little proverb, right?
[8:18] There's another one in verse 27. And which of you being anxious about money can add a single hour to the span of your life? It's just saying, Look, you've got this money and you're really worried about it. It's consuming you.

You thought it would make you really happy. You don't actually live any longer. Is it really helping you? No. That's the kind of proverbial stuff. It's not the whole argument, though. The big argument is around our hearts.
And Jesus says this. He says, If our treasure in life is money and possessions, the result of that will not be peace. It won't be the peace you're looking for.
It will be anxiety. So what do we do about that? And the solution is verses 26 to 34. It's the big chunk. Jesus says a few small things. And then he's this extended comment on it.
This is 26 to 34. Where he talks about the solution to our anxiety that we might have about money. So remember the context here, okay?
[9:20] So this is Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is speaking to his disciples. And they're itinerant. They're moving around a lot. They're obviously worried about money and food and drink and shelter and clothes. And what does Jesus say to them?

He talks to them about birds and flowers and grass. And the argument is a lesser, greater argument. Lesser, greater argument. Let me explain that. Christ says this, verse 26. If I can make

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sure birds get themselves fed, you're going to be okay.
I can feed you. And verse 27. If I can make sure lilies are clothed beautifully, you guys are going to be okay. That's a really beautiful verse, actually, that one.
I remember being in Switzerland, actually. I was in Switzerland many years ago. And I was studying for a couple of months there. And I'm going on this hike.
And this is the middle of nowhere. So you couldn't see any houses. Hiking, I was about an hour out. And I just came to a random field filled with wildflowers.
[10:24] And it was like this meadow. And it was so beautiful. It was so gorgeous. And the flowers didn't have to go to the internet to find out, you know, the latest fashion color trends.

They just existed. God created it like this. It was so gorgeous. If God can make sure the lilies of the field are clothed beautifully, you're going to be okay.
And verse 30. If I can be bothered looking after grass, which lives for a short time and then is burned, it's this worthless. If I can take an interest in the tiniest part of my creation, how much more am I going to care for you in this area of your life?
And you might be thinking, yeah, I guess. I know. Let me just point to something that can be a bit easier to miss in this passage, which I think is really helpful.
When describing the birds in verse 26. Do you notice Jesus says here, he says, your heavenly father looks after them.
[11:29] Your heavenly father looks after them. He doesn't say, when describing the birds, their heavenly father. He says, your heavenly father looks after them.

These things, grass and birds, they don't relate to God as father. They relate to God as creator, but not father. See, the whole idea of father is a really big thing in the Sermon on the Mount.
17 times in his sermon, Jesus talks about your father. See, these birds and flowers, God cares about them. He created them.
The Bible says, not a sparrow falls to the ground without God knowing about it. He cares for his creation. But you, he's your father. This is Christ's argument.
If God cares about them, birds and plants, these created things, can't you see how much more he's going to care for you? And yet we get so anxious about our money and our possessions and finding our security in these things.
[12:37] And your father knows your needs. I'm going to sort of finish up pretty quickly here. So in terms of money, practically. In terms of money, you should talk to a financial advisor.

You should get life insurance. You should plan. You should think ahead. You should save really well. You should be wise. But then tell yourself, I have a heavenly father.
A heavenly father. Not just a father. A father in heaven, which means he is perfect. He is not broken like our heavenly fathers, like our earthly fathers.
I have a heavenly father. And I think when we know that truth, we're moving towards health. We're moving towards being free people. People who are free to seek the kingdom of God first.
And, you know, what does that mean? It means we're praying for the kingdom rather than just praying about our money all the time.
[13:42] It means we want to share our faith because we want to see the kingdom growing. It means seeking the kingdom means responding in obedience to God's laws. It means desiring social reform because we want our community to proximate justice God wants.

That's the stuff we want to be on our minds rather than just like, I've just got to get this money thing sorted. And how do we get there? How do we be people like this?
How do we exchange our anxiety around money? How do we exchange that anxiety for a desire for the kingdom? And I think in part we constantly remind ourselves of the gospel.
We think of Christ's costly work. And we think about what Christ did. So we, what Christ did. So I have a heavenly father and remind yourself of that every day until it changes you. Until you become a generous person.
Until money has no dominion over your heart because you're so caught up and you're so enamored by Jesus. And I want us to think on this.
[14:47] And I want us to think on this before the prayer comes up. So before the intercessor comes up and prays for us. One of these lovely musicians is going to come up now.

And they're going to play something for us in the background. And I want us to spend a little bit of time in prayer. And to Jesus. And I want us to ask the Holy Spirit.

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Is this actually an idol in my life? Am I greedy? Am I a materialist? And open your heart to the Holy Spirit speaking to you about this.
If you want, you can ask people to pray for you, around you, if you'd like. Or you can just pray to God in silence. And if things come up, I'd invite you afterwards to go to the press station over here as well.
That's it for me. Thanks, Emma. Thank you.

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