

## THE RADICAL RABBI: A RADICAL WEALTH (Matthew 6:19-34)

2.14.21

### INTRODUCTION

I love dominoes. Now I don't mean the game, although I played it a lot when I was a kid. And no, I'm not talking about the pizza place either. I'm talking about watching dominoes set up in elaborate designs - all so they can tip over one domino that starts a chain reaction that creates a beautifully planned picture of something while they are all falling over into the next one and the next one and so on. I went on YouTube: You can find videos of this sort of thing that last over 30 minutes. People will spend hours, days, even weeks building these amazing sequences that will then fall over piece-by-piece. Sometimes there are contests between teams making up these designs, or sometimes these will be events used as fundraisers. I've seen people fill up the bleachers in a gym to watch the toppling of a design that fills up the entire floor! In its own way, it can be a fascinating thing to watch.

Now the more I've been getting into the Sermon on the Mount, the more I've seen another kind of sequence playing out in how Christ proceeds from one point to the next as He builds His picture of the Kingdom of God. It's really been fun for me to see the flow of His logic as He creates this "kingdom" picture of His. And I am so excited about today's section because of what He wants us to know about that kingdom - and the absolute joys of living in His "wealth" that are ours to claim. So, as we begin this extraordinary journey into today's message, **let's begin our time with a word of prayer!**

### TEXT AND ANALYSIS

Now before we get into this next section of His Sermon, we need to bring into play two important points, dominoes if you will, that Jesus has made previously over our last couple weeks of study:

1. The first domino: ***"[Y]our Father . . . sees what is done in secret" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:4b.*** Three times in the first half of this chapter, Christ presents this truth: that our Heavenly Father sees us in a way that no earthly father, or mother, or anybody else, could ever see - down into the deepest recesses of our souls. As His audience would have heard from their Scriptures, ***"God ... knows the secrets of the heart" - Psalm 44:21b.***
2. The second domino: ***"[Y]our Father knows what you need before you ask him" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:8b.***

Now both of these are faith statements, meaning that we believe them because God (in the person of Jesus Christ) said them. Faith statements don't ask for proof; as the author of Hebrews explained so well: ***[F]aith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see - Hebrews 11:1.*** And by stating that we have faith in these statements, we are simultaneously expressing our faith in the one who made these statements. Now, going forward, we can also express these statements in the form of questions:

1. Do we believe that God knows the secrets of our hearts? and
2. Do we believe that God knows what we need before we ask?

So, with those two dominoes in place, Jesus begins: ***"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.***

***But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:19-21.***

Jesus is trying to direct His audience's spiritual eyes away from the world they see to the world they can't see but they are invited to know - the eternal world of their Heavenly Father. So, He begins by pointing out the differences between those two worlds:

1. While the treasures of this world come to an end through their breaking down into destruction (thus making them temporary), the treasures of heaven last forever and are never destroyed and can never break down.
2. While the treasures of this world can be taken away due to the sin and greed of this world, the treasures of heaven will never be taken away.

And then the fundamental truth: What you value most reveals what you love most. The only thing that makes anything valuable is the affection we have for it. Christ is implying some deeply personal and penetrating questions: What is it we treasure? What makes that treasure worth our time and devotion? Is what we treasure, is what we value as so important to our lives, temporary or eternal?

Jesus continues: ***"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:22-23.***

Just as a healthy eye provides us the means of seeing in the physical world, so an eye focused on God - on His Kingdom, on His purposes, on His outcomes - will see the spiritual world clearly. We will see where God is working, we will see where God is directing us, and we will see when and where and how God is answering our prayers. In the context at this point in His teaching is that a focus on the treasures, the valuables, and the values of this world can become impediments, even blind spots, that will hinder and even deny us the ability to see God's moving and working in the world. The great danger of this world's temporary treasures is drawing our focus away from God's eternal treasures.

And then He makes a very important point: ***"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" - Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:24.***

Christ's statement here is both a conclusion from the previous section and a bridge to the next section of His message. Another way to state these words is with one word: Choose! Your lives are going to surrender to one of these masters: God or money. You can choose one, but you can't choose both. The audience that day would have understood the importance of choosing as learned from centuries of teaching from some of their most famous and passionate leaders:

1. When Joshua was coming to the end of his life, sharing his final thoughts with the nation of Israel, he reminded them of all the ways in which God had been with them, keeping them safe from hostile nations and bringing them into the Promised Land, conquering all the peoples that stood in their way. Joshua had also seen how quickly they could go from lifting praises to God to complaining against God, and how quickly they could turn to the gods of older times or of the pagan nations which were all around

them. So as he looked back on all that God had done, he challenged them with these words: ***"[C]hoose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" - Joshua 24:15.***

2. When Elijah called the entire nation of Israel to the top of Mount Carmel, the Bible says he challenged their lack of faith in God: ***"How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him" - 1 Kings 18:21b.*** Come on, guys; choose! You see, God did not make us robots, but instead He created us as beings of free will. Therefore - choose!

And now Jesus brings His audience to the logical conclusion of their choice: If they choose to surrender their lives to God, to focus their spiritual eyes on the kingdom of Heaven, to believe that the treasures of heaven are the greatest possibilities of all, and that God does know their needs before even they do, then He has some amazing words of encouragement for them: ***"Therefore I tell you (in other words, based on all we've just talked about), do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?"***

And because they were outdoors, surrounded by the beauties of nature, He lets their surroundings, the things they see every day, become their teachers, as He tells them to consider things they can see all around them at that very moment: ***Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.*** And then Jesus asks two incredibly simple yet important questions: ***Are you not much more valuable than they?*** If God takes such perfectly complete care of something as simple as the birds we see flying all around us, why would we think He wouldn't give so much greater care to us, to people who have so much more meaning to Him? ***Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life*** (in other words, does worry change anything)?

***And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow*** (again, just look around at what you see). ***They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.*** Now Solomon's wealth was the stuff of legend; he ruled over a kingdom where, in the capitol city, according to the Bible, ***silver and gold [were] as common in Jerusalem as stones - II Chronicles 1:15a.*** And yet, according to Christ, all that awe-inspiring, magnificent wealth and beauty was nothing compared to the "flowers of the field"; in fact, it wasn't even close. So once again, Christ makes the point: ***If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you - you of little faith?*** Again, if that's what God does for things literally here today and gone tomorrow, don't you think He's capable of providing so much more for somebody so much more valuable? C'mon, guys; where's your faith?

So, then He concludes with these words: ***"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them*** (even, as we learned last week, before we ask). ***But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*** (in other words, first things first). ***Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own*** (in

other words, we haven't been given tomorrow, just today. Focus on the now. Now will never come again)" - *Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:31-34*.

## **APPLICATION**

Some 500 years ago, a French philosopher by the name of Michel de Montaigne famously observed: "My life has been filled with terrible misfortune - most of which never happened." He was referring to how much of our lives are lived filled with worry: What do I do with this? What do I do with that? What if this happens? What if that happens? What if that happens if this happens? What if I don't get enough sleep? What if I get too much sleep? What if I gain weight? What if I lose weight? What if the car breaks down? What if I lose my job? What if there's too much month at the end of the money? What will my family think? What will my neighbors think? What if, what will, what if, what will ... an issue that remains to this day.

To be honest, we live in a society wracked with worry. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health concerns in the US - that is, an issue of worry, anxiety or fear that becomes impossible to set aside, and that grows into so much significance in a person's life that it interferes with normal daily routines. Over 40 million Americans aged 18 and above are thought to have an anxiety disorder (just under 1 of every 5 of us). Additionally, approximately 7% of children ages 3-17 experience issues with anxiety.

So, what are the things that people worry about the most? I could give you all kinds of lists, but it really doesn't matter. It's been said that: "Worry is that responsibility God never intended you to have." We worry because we're trying to be in control - we're trying to problem-solve, we're trying to imagine, we're trying to fix. We worry because we believe coming up with a solution is all on us. We think that nobody is better than us to remedy our situations. But ultimately, we give ourselves headaches and panic attacks and all kinds of gastric distress because God is not our "go-to," our default, our first response. To borrow from Paul, we explore the things that are seen - the temporary - instead of claiming the things that are unseen - God and His power - the things that are eternal. We take on the problems ourselves; then, if all else fails, "Hey God, you want a crack at this?"

In fact, we are so sure of ourselves and our own abilities that, even when we do pray about things, a lot of the time we still worry. One fix to that? Maybe try thinking about it like this: We all have our various problems; you might say, we own them. But, when we pray, we are transferring that ownership; in other words, there's a title transfer going on - from us to God. That's one of the things that prayer is - giving God our problems. That doesn't make us His foreman or His overseer or supervisor or actually anything. He's pretty capable - and He doesn't need our help. And besides, those problems ain't ours anymore anyway; once we've prayed about something, it belongs to Him. One less thing to worry about!

But in response to that all-too-human reality of being worriers, Christ asks us some very pointed, even uncomfortable questions in this particular part of His Sermon on the Mount, which we need to consider as we view our lives in the light of His words - and those questions are:

1. Where is your life's greatest treasure - that thing on which you place your greatest affection?
2. Do you find yourself still worrying about where your food and clothing are going to

come from?

3. How do you think God views you, meaning how much value do you think you have in God's eyes - a lot, a little or none at all?
4. Do you believe God - every moment of every day - knows your needs?
5. Do you struggle to seek God's kingdom above and beyond anything else? You know, as the groom listening to the traditional marriage vows, I remember these words: "Will you have this woman to be your wedded wife, to live together in holy matrimony? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her and, forsaking all others, keep only unto her as long as you both shall live?" We promise to do that in marriage, but do we struggle "forsaking" all other kingdoms, all other possibilities, to keep our one and only focus on God's kingdom?

## CONCLUSION

And one final question before we close. It's so simple but so important: Do you believe God? Do you believe His promises, that everything He has ever said is the absolute flawless truth that will never change or pass away? God has given us some amazing words regarding meeting our needs with his radical wealth - not given us simply to read but to claim and to make the very foundation of our hearts and lives. Remember these?

***The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing - David, Psalm 23:1. Radical wealth!***

***Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart - David, Psalm 37:4. Radical wealth!***

***"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. Test Me in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it" – God speaking, Malachi 3:10. Radical wealth!***

***He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all - how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? - Paul, Romans 8:32. Radical wealth!***

***Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus - Paul, Philippians 4:6-7. Radical wealth!***

***[M]y God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus - Paul, Philippians 4:19. Radical wealth!***

***Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you - I Peter 5:7. Radical wealth!***

And what can't be lost is that God fulfilling His promises, pouring His radical wealth (not to mention His radical grace) on us, while it may seem miraculous to us, is no miracle to Him at all - any more than my lifting this stool is a miracle. All that God has promised is simply the fulfillment of His power. So, we can pray with great expectation (and no worries) because whatever we ask is fully within His unlimited, infinite power and grace to do as He sees fit. And that should give us a confidence that blows way yonder past the limitations of our own imagination or thinking. We give our requests over to a God who can truly do all things.

So, all these promises we mentioned are true because God makes them true. All these promises are true because His power to make them true. And God gave us His word so that

we could see, as Joshua observed *"that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed"* - *Joshua 23:14b*.

So how do we change our mindsets from worry? How do we change so that Christ's words are not just read but embraced in our hearts and amplified in our lives? By setting our minds on God. By understanding the truth and meaning behind these words of the apostle Paul: *"[O]ur citizenship is in heaven"* - *Paul, Philippians 3:20a*. That's where our home is. That's where our future is. That's where our eternal destiny is. That's where our Heavenly Father is - and where our mindsets need to be. So how do we do that in practical terms?

1. First, spend intentional time in prayer. Take every opportunity to make that time happen, just like you would with your dearest friend. That is our first connection to our Father in heaven - talking to Him, about everything. There is nothing too big; there is nothing too small. He cares about us down to the specific number of hairs on our head. Just talk to Him - He's listening.
2. Second, spend intentional time in Bible study. That is our second connection to our Father in heaven. It's His word. Don't let a sermon or a Bible study be your only source of spiritual food; I promise, you will starve. Seek it like you seek time with your favorite food, enjoying all the sensations of eating even as it nourishes you. His word comes with everything we need to live the most fulfilled life possible. Take it in, savor it - and then go back to the "buffet" for more. In fact, keep going back for more. It's non-fattening - and it will always satisfy.

The world would tell us that we need to pay attention to this life - the things we see, the things we need to have and should want to own, and all the other "noise" around us. The only problem with that: The world doesn't see God. The world doesn't want to. So which worldview are we going to claim - the view that sees God or the one that doesn't? The view that revels in God's radical wealth or the view that only seeks after the treasures of earth. It's kind of like this: The more we intentionally, consciously seek to see God and to build relationship with Him - by knowing everything we can about Him, by talking to Him about everything - the more our mindsets will change. We have ourselves as the best example of that: Think how much your mindset changed when you fell in love and got married.

Pretty much every way you used to think changed because pretty much everything in your life had been changed. Well, why not think about our lives with God the same way: The more time we spend with God, the more we talk with Him, the more we will fall in love with Him, and the more we fall in love with Him, the more our mindsets will change. Being in relationship does that. Being in prayer does that. Being in His word does that. And the more we will understand that letting our lives be freed from worry starts with a mindset anchored in heaven, seeing the greatest glory we can know in our lives as being reflections of knowing our God.

So bottom line: While our feet may be planted on earth, our mindset is in heaven - which allows us to know the God-offered life where we can truly live anxious for nothing. Why worry? We've got radical wealth! Let's pray!