

# Dedication Sunday

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Matthew 6:19-34

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Today we come to renew our commitment to God as members of Christ Church. This is an important annual event in our life as a church. This is a day when I unashamedly ask you to show your commitment to Christ Church and what God is doing amongst us here. This is a day when we nail our colours to the mast and declare openly and decisively, "This is where I stand, Lord. I am part of this church and I will serve you here".

We always welcome visitors and try to make everyone feel welcome whether you are passing through on holiday, here for a short time or just taking a look see. If that describes where you are today please feel welcome. We value your prayers for us on his important day in our year. You are most welcome.

Our **Dedication forms** give us opportunity to indicate areas of ministry we want to commit to, like feeding the hungry, children's church, ambassadors, worship group, etc.

We can also indicate our involvement and commitment to what we term "**Christ Church Scattered**" ministry – where we are involved in an area of ministry that is not under the direct oversight of Christ Church – like serving in Scripture Union, or volunteering at the Warehouse, or being involved in an NGO like Learn to Earn, ...

We also recognise, and indeed encourage, members of Christ Church to support ministries and missions financially as well.

Under the umbrella term of Christ Church Scattered ministry we also include your secular employment be it in education, or in health care, or in government, or industry, or business, as a self employed or employed by others. As a church we recognise that God calls us and places in many different places where we can be salt and light and bear witness to the Gospel.

Part, not the only part I hasten to add, of us declaring that we are, or want to be, members of Christ Church is laying before the Lord what we will give financially to the work and ministry here.

In this regard I want to look at Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter six where he speaks about storing up treasures in heaven.

**READ: Matthew 6:19-34**

There are three good reasons for me to speak about money and giving.

**(1) Jesus said a lot about it**

It is reckoned that 15 percent of everything Jesus said relates to this topic.

Here are some that you know well ...

*"One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Mark 10:21).*

*"Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven . . . Woe to you rich, for you have received your consolation" (Luke 6:20).*

*"Whoever does not renounce all that they have cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).*

*"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Luke 18:25).*

*"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." (Luke 12:15).*

*"Zacchaeus . . . said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. . . .' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house' (Luke 19:8-9).*

*"But God said to [the man who built even bigger barns], 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they*

*be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:20-21).*

Over and over Jesus is relentless in his radical call to what has been termed a wartime lifestyle and a hazardous liberality ("she put in all that she had").

So I am in good company with Jesus, not to mention the apostle Paul

*<sup>2</sup>In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. <sup>3</sup>For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, <sup>4</sup>they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. <sup>5</sup>And they went beyond our expectations; having given themselves first of all to the Lord, they gave themselves by the will of God also to us. (2 Corinthians 8:2ff)*

So the first good reason for talking about giving and money is that Jesus said a lot about it.

## **(2) Releasing more into Ministry and Missions**

Second, can you imagine what could happen if we as members of Christ Church let alone the wider Parish of St John's and the Church in Cape Town, were gripped by the radical life of open-handed liberality that Jesus taught. Imagine if we really tasted the freedom from fear and greed that Jesus bought with his own blood ... there would be an avalanche of ministry and missions and acts of mercy!

Another Warehouse, or two or three launched this year.

More church planting, more young people sent off to Uganda, Namibia, Limpopo, Niger, ...

I thought as I was preparing this should I actually say this. Am I not just creating more work for myself? Would it not be better to just let things tick over gently, Duncan.

I want to let you know – I am up for it. I don't mind hard work. Bring it on!

So the second reason for talking about this is that God can release an avalanche of ministry and mission.

### **(3) Giving People Are the Happiest People on Earth**

Thirdly the reason for speaking about this is, if we are personally were set free to give the way the New Testament talks about giving, we would be the happiest people on earth.

*Proverbs 14:21, "Happy are those who are kind to the needy."*

*Proverbs 22:9, "The generous will be blessed."*

*1 Timothy 6:9, "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction."*

*Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

As Pastor of Christ Church I long that our young people would learn quickly, and our older people would learn before it is too late, that there is no positive correlation between having many things and being happy.

A life of simplicity that curtails spending on self and is matched by a passion to advance the kingdom through giving, will be a far happier life and far more fulfilled life, than a life of indulgence and luxury.

So for these three reasons I am happy to speak on money and giving.

- 1) It's puts me in good company;
- 2) it could, God-willing, release an avalanche of ministry and missions; and,
- 3) if you embrace the call, it will make you happier than all the wealth and luxury in the world.

## ***Three Imperatives***

In Matthew 6:19-34 there are three main imperatives, three commands – very happy commands. Everything else is meant to help you see the commands as wise and right and joyfully possible. The three commands are

### **1) "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven"**

found in verse 20

### **2) "Do not be anxious,"**

found three times.

*Verse 25: "Do not be anxious about your life."*

*Verse 31: "Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"*

*Verse 34: "Do not be anxious about tomorrow."*

### **3) "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"**

found in verse 33.

## ***How do these imperatives relate to each other?***

*"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"* is the **large, overarching command** – be passionate about experiencing the saving, purifying, empowering, love-producing, reign of God in your life and over all the world.

It is praying the prayer *"Your kingdom come!"* – in my life, in our country, in the nations of Africa, in the world.

Then *"Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven"* is a **specific instance** of what seeking God's kingdom involves. Seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness involves not trying to be rich on earth but trying to be rich in heaven, that is, rich in God.

Then *"Do not be anxious"* is **the condition of the heart** by which we break free from our addiction to earth-treasure and give ourselves with passion to heaven-treasure.

Those are the three main imperatives in the text. That is what Jesus teaches us as we sit at his feet as it were and listen to his instructions to his disciples. His heart for us is that we be free from anxiety, seeking his kingdom, laying up treasure in heaven and not on earth.

### ***So what does it mean to lay up treasure in heaven?***

Jesus is saying that there are two ways to live: you can live with a view to accumulating valuable things on earth, or you can live with a view to accumulating valuable things in heaven.

Jesus says: the mark of those who follow him as his disciples is that their eyes are on heaven, their orientation is towards heaven, and that their behaviour is assessed in that light.

The question Jesus wants us to ask as we consider the use of the money and resources we have is – is this a choice for heaven or for earth? He says very clearly that it can't be both. You have to choose between them. That's the point of verse 24:

*“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.”*

So the question to ask as we make a financial decision is, who is the master in this one? Either we are mastered by money and therefore ignore God, or we are mastered by God and make money a servant of the kingdom.

But let's be more specific. What does Jesus mean "devote your life to accumulating treasure in heaven" – what is the main thing he has in mind that we should do now?

It is clear from the context that it is giving rather than accumulating.

In Luke 12:32-33 Jesus says ...

*"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys."*

Here Jesus explains how you *"provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old"* and how you *"provide yourselves with treasure in the heavens that does not fail,"* namely, *"Sell your possessions and give to the needy."* That's how you do it.

In other words, possessions on earth are not for accumulating, they are for distributing in ways that Christ is honoured and our joy in heaven is increased. When we give – especially when we give so generously that we have to sell something to have anything to give – we show that Jesus is our treasure and that we love others more than we love our own security and comfort.

Randy Alcorn, in his book, *The Treasure Principle*, says, *"I'm convinced that the greatest deterrent to giving is this: the illusion that earth is our home" (p. 44).* It's not; Christ is our home.

Rather than treating this world as our home and treating this age as though it were a time of peace, we need to adopt a wartime life style recognising that we are in fact living in a time of conflict. There is conflict between God and Satan, and between righteousness and unrighteousness, and between belief and unbelief, and between light and darkness. And the stakes in this conflict are eternal.

Tonight in this service of Holy Communion we are reminded our lives are hidden with Christ in God. We are coming to take to our selves the precious body and blood of Jesus – that he may dwell in us and we in him. He gave his all for us. He laid down his life for us. He gave his all for us.

The way we use our money expresses our hearts.

Paul writes to the Colossians 3:1-3

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things*

*above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.  
Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.  
For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

We are declaring that when we come to Holy Communion. We declare that in the way we spend our money.

If you count Christ Church as your spiritual home I ask you to see your pledge to support the ministry and mission outreach of this church as one way (not the only way) in which you can be laying up treasures in heaven.

### ***Now – let me ask this...***

- What prevents us from giving radically and liberally in the way Jesus taught?
- What keeps that avalanche of mercy ministries and mission being released?
- What holds us back from knowing that joy and happiness which Scripture speaks about?

Well Jesus addresses the main obstacle to giving in such a way that we store up treasure in heaven in the next few verses. Three times in verses 25-34 Jesus says, "**Do not be anxious.**" or "**Do not worry.**" (NIV)

*Verse 25: "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."*

*Verse 31: "Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"*

*Verse 34: "Do not be anxious about tomorrow."*

Money is closely allied to worry. Michael Green comments that on the whole the more money people have the more anxious care they expend on how to keep it, increase it, and protect it.

In our society we pay more to those who look after and care for our money than we do to those who care for and teach our children.

More money, more worry – is the way things go.

Now the truth is that worry is not a little weakness that we all give into from time to time. It is a sin that is strictly forbidden. As one commentator I read put it this way. *Worry is practical atheism; it is an affront to God.*

And in these verses Jesus gives four good reasons why we should not worry.

### ***First - worry is unnecessary***

*<sup>25</sup>“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? <sup>26</sup>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. Are you not much more valuable than they?”*

Quite often Jesus uses a common rabbinical method of arguing where you argue from the lesser to the greater. So an example of arguing from the lesser to the greater would be when Jesus says in Luke 11:13 ...

*“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*

But here Jesus turns that method around and argues from the greater to the lesser and says in effect if God has given us life and a body, both admittedly more important than food and clothing, will he not also give us the latter?

In verse 26 he draws our attention to what happens in creation. To worry about food and drink is to have learned nothing from the natural creation. The point is not that disciples need not work—birds do not simply wait for God to drop food into their beaks—but that they need not fret and worry and be anxious. It is unnecessary, because God who gave us life and gave us our bodies, knows what we need and we are valuable to him.

Do we deduce then that hard work and careful planning and making provision is not necessary. That is not what Jesus is saying. He is saying worrying about whether we are loved by God and whether God knows what we need is an unnecessary expenditure of emotional energy.

## ***Second - worry is fruitless***

*Verse 27: Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?*

The word used in the original can mean either an hour to your life or it can be translated a few centimetres to your height.

Worry is not only unnecessary it is also fruitless. It does not add anything to the equation. It does not add one centimetre to your height or one hour to your life. In fact worry is more likely to shorten your life than prolong it.

So to worry does or be anxious does no good. It accomplishes nothing. It doesn't help.

There is a place for intentional prayer.

Lord I recognise that there is a battle under way. I recognise that just as you don't want me to be anxious the enemy does.

I renounce the enemy's tactics. I say no to this useless emotion of anxiety. I refuse to be mastered by it and have my energy drained by it.

I repent of believing his lies that anxiety will help that it will comfort me. I turn to you Jesus. I will listen to your commands – your promises. I will allow them to shape my life.

## ***Third - worry is blind***

Just look around you. Can't you see what is glaringly obvious?

*<sup>28</sup>“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. <sup>29</sup>Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup>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?  
(argument from lesser to greater)*

The point here is that you are eternal, and the grass and the lilies last for a day. Yet God clothes them more beautifully than Solomon.

What are we being reminded of here? God is sovereign. God's sovereign rule over the world of nature extends to the seemingly insignificant colour of a lily and variety of Ericas in a field of Fynbos. These are not mere natural laws that God put in motion and set loose to do good or bad things with no control over them. These are his doing.

The message for us is that if God is so intimately and lavishly involved with grass and flowers which are like a vapour, then how shall he not care for his children who are eternal? You are made in his image.

***So - worry is unnecessary, it is fruitless, it is blind. It is essentially failure to trust God.***

*<sup>31</sup>So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup>For the pagans (people who do not believe – who have no relationship with God) run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.*

The question is – what are you running after?

God knows what we need. Worry is in effect saying, God I do not trust you. I don't believe you know my needs and I don't believe that you care and love me. These things are the number one priority. Loving and serving you, God, comes further down the list.

That is not what we want to say. We want to say not only in our words that we sing and but by our choices and actions – Jesus you are number one, you are my first priority.

To his followers Jesus says ...

*<sup>33</sup>But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Jesus' expects his disciples to live lives qualitatively different from those who have no trust in God's fatherly care and no fundamental goals beyond material things.

Jesus' disciples are not simply to **refrain** from the *pursuit* of material temporal things as their primary goal in order to be differentiated from pagans. Instead, we are to **replace** such pursuits with goals of far greater significance.

To seek first the kingdom is to desire above all to enter into, submit to, and participate in the prayer we are taught to pray ...

*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

Seek God's kingdom as first priority and these things – these life necessities – will be added in.

### ***But what if they are not?***

What about the hardships that believers face? Is Jesus being unfeeling and unrealistic? No.

He knew what it was to go hungry. He knew what it was to be naked and strung up on a cross. But these things did not rob him of his loving trust in his heavenly Father, whose sovereign overarching love would not allow anything to happen to him, which was in the last analysis, for good.

And in the final verse he almost whimsically lays aside these high ideals and says, of course there are troubles in life. No one promised you a bed of roses. In fact the only thing we are promising is a cross.

*If you want to be my disciple you have to take up your cross and follow me.*

In verse 34 he appeals to common sense.

So ...

### ***Fourthly - worrying about tomorrow does not make sense***

*<sup>34</sup>Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

I was not sure whether to mention this but the Greek word that is used here for "troubles" is "kakia".

Each day has got enough kakia.

Jesus is saying I know there are troubles. I live in the real world.

Worrying over tomorrow's troubles, misfortunes, is not worth it. Give attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with what ever hard things come up when the time comes.

Don't use up today's grace on tomorrow's troubles.

So the stop worrying – it is unnecessary, it fruitless, it is blind, it is does not make sense – but most importantly it hurts God. It is a sin. It is practical atheism.

Our Dedication today is an opportunity to say definitively to God. I will follow Jesus. I will seek first your Kingdom. It is an opportunity to legs on our prayers and worship.

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Lord, help me to recognise where I have allowed worry about material provision to come before my concern to see your kingdom advance.

I repent of that Lord. I recognise it as sin and turn away from it.

I seek now Lord to replace that anxiety and worry with trust in you. Give me grace Lord for today, and for tomorrow. You know the troubles we face. You know I our needs. Keep our eyes on you Lord. Fill us now with your Holy Spirit. May grace abound in our lives as we seek your kingdom and delight in rejoice as see it advancing. Hank you Lord for including us in what you are doing.

May kingdom come, may your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Amen.