

UPSIDE DOWN

(Kingdom Living)

By Rev. Will Nelken

Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, February 4, 2017

The passage we shall look at today is the mid-section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, from Matthew 5-7. Our record of the Sermon opens with the Beatitudes, Christ's congratulatory declarations ("blessed" describes a condition that is deserving of congratulations) of the ideals of His Kingdom.

5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5:5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

5:8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.

5:10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

5:11 "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil things about you falsely on account of me. 5:12 Rejoice and be glad because your reward is great in heaven, for they persecuted the prophets before you in the same way.

A.W. Tozer described the Beatitudes this way: If you wanted to accurately describe the human race to someone unacquainted with it, you could take the Beatitudes, turn them wrong side out, and say, "Here is your human race."

This thought is a key to the entire Sermon, which highlights contrasts between "what is" in this world and "what is to be" in Christ's Kingdom. Recognizing such contrasts is the beginning of real learning.

When we reach today's passage, at the end of the sixth chapter, the contrast is sharply applied to our everyday affairs. The imagery was familiar to Jesus' hearers: the service of slaves to their masters. Most of those who heard Jesus gladly were in the service of others—whether slaves or servants, soldiers or hirelings.

And, just like all of us, they were pulled, first this way then that, by cultural and spiritual forces that competed for their attention and allegiance.

Will it ever end? Is there an answer to this incessant, wearisome struggle? Where can we find peace?

Jesus speaks to our questions and confusion with brilliant clarity and down-to-earth simplicity.

Matthew 6:24-34

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.

²⁵ “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing?

²⁶ Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to him than they are? ²⁷ Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

²⁸ “And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, ²⁹ yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. ³⁰ And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

³¹ “So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ ³² These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. ³³ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

³⁴ “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Two Masters

²⁴ **No one can serve two masters.** For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.

And that’s the way it is with masters in our lives; either we love them or we hate them. We devote ourselves to them or we despise them (treat them with contempt).

Other translations use the word “mammon,” which means more than just money—all manner of wealth and possessions—and represents material greed and dependency. So, it is appropriate to speak of it in a “master-slave” relationship, for it often takes people captive and demands their allegiance.

1 Timothy 6:6-10

^{6:6} Now godliness combined with contentment brings great profit. ^{6:7} For we have brought nothing into this world and so we cannot take a single thing out either. ^{6:8} But if we have food and shelter, we will be satisfied with that. ^{6:9} Those who **long to be rich**, however, stumble into temptation and a trap and many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ^{6:10} For the **love of money** is the root of all evils. Some people in **reaching for it** have strayed from the faith and stabbed themselves with many pains.

1 Timothy 6:17-19

6:17 Command those who are rich in this world's goods not to be haughty or to set their hope on riches, which are uncertain, but on God who richly provides us with all things for our enjoyment.

6:18 Tell them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous givers, sharing with others.

*6:19 In this way they will save up a treasure for themselves as a **firm foundation** for the future and so lay hold of what is **truly life**.*

What are the non-negotiable values in your life that provide a “firm foundation”? What are the things you will never trade away, never give up, never deny? When you have them, non-negotiable priorities answer questions and settle uncertainties *before* they arise; they keep you from a lot of trouble and heartache.

Wealth = Worry

25 “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing?

Anxiety is a major headache in our society. To the point that the rate of suicides has increased sharply, even among teenagers. How does the Bible speak to this issue?

Philippians 4:6-7

4:6 Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. 4:7 And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Urgency doesn't deserve your immediate attention. Urgent screams; important never does. Do what is important *first*.

Source Over Resource

26 Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to him than they are?

Organizational and leadership skills never trump personal devotion and faith. Appearing to have it all together, doesn't mean you actually do. Can you discern the difference between trusting in yourself and trusting in God?

Real Futility

27 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

²⁸ “And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing,²⁹ yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are.³⁰ And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

Don’t waste time worrying about things beyond your control. Take care of the things you are truly responsible for, and be carefully indifferent to the rest.

Not An Orphan

³¹ “So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’³² These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.

Don’t let the currents of life define you. If you just “go with the flow” you will drift from God’s purpose, inevitably. Instead, give your attention to your Heavenly Father and do what He wants.

Above All Else

³³ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

Do what’s best for the Kingdom of God. The kingdoms of this world, including the “kingdom of me” vie for your allegiance. They cry after you with the sound of urgency. They get in your face to distract you. But you have only one Master, only one King—do as He directs. What you want, like, or prefer must be repeatedly submitted to God.

The currency of responsibility is “rights.” The more rights you demand, the less responsibility will be entrusted to you. The more responsibilities you embrace, the fewer rights you will retain.

Set God, and His Kingdom, above all else.

Enough

³⁴ “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Learn from yesterday.

Pray about tomorrow.

Live today in bold faithfulness.

In this way, you may serve **one master** effectively, and live in peace.