



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 6:19-34

Topic

Jesus tells us how we should act in the world
if we are seeking first the kingdom of God

Title

"Actions Seek Louder than Words"

Introduction

I'm going to recite a list of five companies. What do they have in common?

Chick-fil-A, Interstate Battery, Tyson Foods, In-n-Out Burger, and Hobby Lobby.

They have in common that they publicly proclaim biblical Jesus Christ.

- Both Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby are closed on Sundays as a nod to setting it aside as a day of worship.
- The Interstate Battery website openly encourages you to accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.
- Tyson Foods offers its employees on-site chaplain services and is known for donating massive quantities of food to America's poor.
- In-n-Out Burger prints the Bible reference John 3:16 on its cups for everyone to see. The milkshake cup references Proverbs 3:5. Burger wrappers have Revelation 3:20.

Defying all conventional wisdom, in a highly competitive business environment, they each have determined to openly preach the Gospel.

I should say that their founders made that determination. We applaud them for it, holding them up as examples of Christian courage.

What they have done on a national and international level started on

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a personal level when each of them obeyed Jesus' command to seek first the kingdom of God. It started in hearts focused on rewards in Heaven rather than riches on earth. It involved an assurance of God's providence that overcame anxiety.

The founders of those companies are average believers like you and I. They are no different from us - and that means we are no different from them. We may never find a Christian company, but we **are** expected to seek first the kingdom of God at whatever company we work for, or in whatever company we keep.

As we build up to verse thirty-three, which commands us to "seek first the kingdom of God," we can ask ourselves two probing questions: #1 Would You Say You Are Pursuing Rewards Or Riches?, and #2 Would You Say You Are Prone To Assurance Or To Anxiety?

#1 Would You Say You Are Pursuing Rewards Or Riches?

(v19-24)

It will help to keep in mind that Jesus was speaking to folks who thought that worldly riches were a sign of spirituality. The wealthier you were, the more God must be blessing you for being spiritual.

Jesus put the riches of this world into their proper perspective.

Mat 6:19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;

Mat 6:20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

If you are rich on earth it is no sign Heaven is blessing you. For one thing all your earthly wealth is fragile.

- Clothing was a major measure of wealth in ancient times. It could be quickly ruined by moths.

- "Rust" refers to something being eaten away and probably means mildew or rodents eating stores of grain.
- Thieves can easily "break in and steal" any valuables.

Closer to home, the recent recession is said to have wiped out two decades of Americans' wealth, plummeting 40% from 2007 to 2010.

It's kind of silly, when you think about it, to suppose that worldly wealth is the best God can do to reward you. *It isn't the best He can do.* He can reward you in Heaven and those treasures are secure now and forever.

Right away Jesus is elevating our thinking. He wants us to approach life on earth from a heavenly vantage point. My time on earth isn't to be wasted accruing temporary riches, but eternal rewards.

Mat 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also

- If what you "treasure" the most is in Heaven, then that is where your "heart" will be - meaning that is what will determine the direction of your life and the decisions you make along your way.
- If what you "treasure" the most is on the earth, then that is where your "heart" will be - meaning that is what will determine the direction of your life and the decisions you make along your way.

I should, therefore, be able to look at my life - my decisions and the direction I'm headed - and determine where my treasure truly is.

I can only look at **my** life; you need to look at yours. But *do* look at it, honestly and objectively.

Is there evidence in your direction and your decisions that you are pursuing heavenly rewards? Or is the direction of your life and your decisions motivated more by earthly goals and concerns?

Jesus emphasized what He was saying by giving two examples.

Mat 6:22 "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.

Mat 6:23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

We need to approach this illustration culturally, not scientifically. Jesus wasn't giving an anatomy lesson.

Two verses from Proverbs put the Jewish understanding of the "eye" into context:

Pro 22:9 He who has a **generous eye** will be blessed, For he gives of his bread to the poor.

Pro 28:22 A man with an **evil eye** hastens after riches, And does not consider that poverty will come upon him.

- The "good" eye Jesus mentioned belongs to a generous person - one who looks to give to the causes of the kingdom of God because his heart is set there.
- The "bad" eye identifies the person who accrues riches for himself because he treasures things that are earthly.

Simply put, no matter how spiritual a person thinks he or she is, if they are pursuing riches before rewards, they are walking in darkness. And it is a very dark 'darkness' because they think they are in the light.

The generous person, who is seeking the kingdom, is "full of light" and, therefore, is shining in the darkness of this world - a "lamp" to attract others to Jesus Christ.

Jesus then gave a second illustration.

Mat 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

"Mammon" is a general term for money and property, or what we simply call wealth.

Think in terms of slavery. You can be employed by more than one employer; *but you can't serve more than one master.*

This verse is another help to us as we determine whether rewards or riches are our real priority. You see, it's all too easy to think I can pursue both at the same time.

For example. I might think I am a 'good' Christian because I work hard and I don't embezzle from my company. But do I evangelize my company? Am I seeking to make an impact for Jesus wherever I am - or do I buy into the thinking that my workplace is no place for my faith to be revealed?

Am I content to put in my time, stay under the radar, and build wealth and a career that have little or nothing to do with Jesus, going, to church on the side and effectively living two separate lives?

The founders of the four companies I mentioned decided to represent Jesus and further His Gospel. They made a conscious effort to determine how they could use their company or its products and services to let the world know about Jesus.

That's all I'm saying. **Make a conscious effort to determine how you, in your company or in the company you keep, can let others know about Jesus.**

It hasn't been easy or without controversy for the founders of those companies. Both Chic-Fil-A and Hobby Lobby have been in the news for taking a stand for what they believe.

It won't be easy for you, either; but great is your reward in Heaven when you seek first the kingdom of God.

#2 Would You Say You Are Prone To Assurance Or To Anxiety?
(v25-34)

Dr. Walter Cavert did a study of the things we worry about. He discovered that:

- 40% of the things we worry about never happen.
- 30% of our worries concern the past.
- 12% percent of our worries are needless worries about our health.

- 10% percent of our worries are insignificant or petty (things that will really not make much of a difference in our lives one way or another).

Only 8% of our worries concern legitimate troubles.

These next verses mention "worry" in some form or another six times. It's the word from which we get our word "anxious" or "anxiety." When Jesus says, "Do not worry," it can be translated, "Give no anxious thought to."

Let's get something out of the way. Even the greatest saints have been prone to anxiety. The apostle Paul, who would exhort us to "be anxious for nothing," spoke of certain anxieties he had, e.g., his anxiousness to hear news of the condition of the fledgling church in Thessalonica.

I don't want anyone to leave here condemned because you worry. I'm not saying worry is OK either. The point is to realize you are prone to worry when you could just as easily be prone to the assurance that God is overseeing your life on the earth.

You can be prone to assurance because of the doctrine of God's providence. Henry Thiessen defined God's providence by saying,

it is that continuous activity of God whereby He makes all the events of the physical, mental, and moral realms work out His purposes; and that this purpose is nothing short of the original design of God in creation. To be sure, evil has entered the universe, but it is not allowed to thwart God's original, benevolent, wise and holy purpose.

God is working to an ultimate purpose for you and that is to make you like Jesus.

Mat 6:25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"

People in the first century lived right on the edge. They **did** worry a lot about their daily necessities because everything was so precarious.

This statement by Jesus was revolutionary to them. Anxiety about these things was their way of life. How could they not worry?

Well, for one thing Jesus told them to see that "life" is more than physical. It is more than "food" and "clothing" for my physical body.

Life is spiritual. If I can really lock-in to the understanding that I am a spiritual being, that I will live forever, my concerns about the physical necessities of life will cease to cause me anxiety.

Mat 6:26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

First allow me to point out that birds work hard for their food. Jesus' point isn't for us to kick-back and do nothing. It's to see that He is capable in any situation of making an abundant provision.

Which means that if He does not make an abundant provision, it must be His providence to withhold.

There is no promise here that I will never go hungry or be in need. The promise is that God knows my needs and is able to care for me.

We are intrigued by actors who radically prepare for certain roles.

- Robert De Nero gained 60 pounds to play aging boxer Jake Lamotta in *Raging Bull*.
- Christian Bale, perhaps best known for being the most recent Batman, normally weighs 185 pounds. He lost 63 pounds for the lead role in a movie called *The Machinist*.

One gorged; the other starved; both did what was necessary in order to be conformed into a certain image.

God knows whether you need a gorging or a starving in order for you to be conformed into the image of Jesus. Either way there's no use in being anxious about it. My only concern ought to be to keep myself in the will of God for my life.

Mat 6:27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

Jesus probably had in mind length of life, not height. Anxiety over my daily needs won't give me any more days.

There might be a hint here, too, of the fact that God knows the number of my days. He plans accordingly - providing just what I need when I need it in order to be conformed day-by-day into the image of Jesus Christ.

Mat 6:28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;
Mat 6:29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Mat 6:30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

There is no promise here that I will constantly be clothed like Solomon. In fact, I might find myself some day using duct tape to hold my shoes together. Either way there's no use in being anxious about it.

It's unlikely Jesus was chastising anyone in particular for having "little faith." The idea is that a person who is anxious about daily needs doesn't understand God's providence and needs to grow in their faith.

Jesus once said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34). That is the mindset He was suggesting to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. He wasn't saying you'd always have abundant physical resources; He was saying that you are essentially a spiritual being and should prioritize accordingly, knowing your Father is able to provide.

Mat 6:31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

Mat 6:32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

By "Gentiles" Jesus meant nonbelievers. Since God is your Father, you need not concentrate on physical needs. You've been set free to live spiritually.

You can save and have insurance and plan for retirement; that isn't the Lord's point. His point is that those things must be secondary to you - second to Him and second to furthering His kingdom.

One commentator said, "you must replace your earthly pursuits with goals of great kingdom significance."

Jesus says it better:

Mat 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

The "kingdom of God" is simply the rule of God. Yes, there will be a literal kingdom on the earth, in the future. Yes, Jesus was offering that kingdom to the Jews. But His kingdom is anywhere you submit to Him as your King. And it is everywhere that you determine to reveal Him as your King.

His "righteousness" is probably a reference to the beatitudes earlier expounded upon. They are the spiritual actions you are capable of because of His indwelling Holy Spirit.

"And all these things," meaning the things God knows you really need, the physical things, "shall be added to you."

When you "add" something it is because it was missing. If I'm cooking the recipe keeps telling me to add ingredients. God knows what to add to my life; and He knows when to add it.

Wherever I am, whatever I'm doing, whoever I'm with - I am to consciously "seek first the kingdom of God" and walk in the "righteousness" made possible by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

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What can I do, right now, right here, to further the Gospel? That's the constant question I am to be contemplating.

Mat 6:34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Each day until the Lord's coming to resurrect and rapture the church there will be plenty of "trouble" to "worry" about.

Jesus doesn't say it here, but I will. *I could die before tomorrow!* Why spend today worrying about a tomorrow that might never come?

If I live, things could dramatically change by tomorrow - making all my worrying today a foolish expenditure of time and thought.

There are plenty of financial verses that discuss future planning. Jesus wasn't canceling them out. But let's not be too quick to dismiss what He says here in favor of our finances on earth.

He **was** saying that everything needs to be interpreted through the principle of seeking first the kingdom of God.

And, really, the financial planning recommended in the Bible **always** suggests giving to God first and being generous to meet the needs of others. Any biblical wealth-building plan needs to have as its number one priority seeking first the kingdom of God.

Most of us are prone to a certain amount of anxiety. Jesus assures us that God is our very capable Father and is working all things together for our good.

Just remember that what we need most is **spiritual**; it is to grow spiritually.

Make sure that your plan for the future looks beyond the seventy or eighty years you might have on the earth. Plan into forever. Spend and invest in the kingdom of God.