

Birds and the Kingdom
(Matthew 6:25-34)

Turn to Matt 6. If I live the way Jesus says, who takes care of me? If I lay up treasures in heaven not on earth, how will I survive? If I can only serve one Lord, and serve God not Money, how will I have enough? If I live as Jesus says, who takes care of me?

Jesus answers these in 6:25-34, and he talks about God and nature to answer those questions.

Let's begin at the end of Matthew 6:24. Pretend that there is no verse division between v24 and v25, which there was not when this was written, and no heading in your Bible. Headings help us find what we're looking for, but they slice up the Bible into little pieces in a way that does not belong.

You can get some versions of the Bible with no verse numbers, and no headings. If you are a Bible reader, try that. You can download it online that way. Try it out.

1, What Happens if we Worry about Not Having Enough? (6:24c-25)

You cannot serve God and Money. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear.

If we worry, we will try to serve both God and Money. You cannot do that, so don't worry. *You cannot serve God and Money. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear.*

I have certainly worried about not having enough. If you're worried about this, how can you make that stop? I'm not sure you can. So do this: live as if you're not worried. Even if you are worried, live as if you trust God to provide.

2, You are Alive and you have a Body, so don't Worry! (6:25b)

Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?

Now that is a curious line. Yes, of course, life is more important than food, and the body is more important than clothes. What's the point? Why is that a reason not to worry about food or clothes? Jesus considers this a reason not to worry. I am alive, and I have a body, so why would I worry about food or clothes - how does Jesus get that?

The only way this is a reason not to worry is if a living body is a daily gift from God. This line of Jesus' does not work any other way. Every day that I have life and have a body, *it is a gift from God.* In the Bible, all of creation is attached to God by something like a great umbilical cord. Life always pouring through.

If God makes sure that I, today, have life and a body that works, **if** God keeps giving gifts like that, **then** will he not give what body and life need, like food and clothes?

How much do you have to change how you think about being alive, and about your body, for the logic of Jesus to work? I have to change quite a bit. I do not think about being alive, and having a body, like this. But I'm getting there.

3, Look how God feeds the birds. (6:26)

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?

I once believed that God made robins to sense where the earthworms were, and he made woodpeckers to be able to pound into trees and dig out insects, and he made worms and insects, and that's how God feeds the birds.

I remember reading these verses thinking that way, and realizing that it did not work. If that is how God feeds the birds, there was still every reason to worry. It was still all up to me from here on. Jesus thinks God feeds the birds in my yard, and yours, and the forest.

Matt 10:29 *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Not one of them falls to the ground without your Father.* I have been chasing this line back and forth through my mind. *Not one of them falls to the ground without your Father* (10:29). The next line in Matthew 10 says: *even the very hairs of your head are numbered.*

Now, if you want the written word of God to assure you that God cares about *you, you* and no one else, that is the line: *even the very hairs of your head are numbered.* Remember that God does not know anything just as information, as facts. He knows only because he cares, he has relationship with us.

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?

Jesus is telling us that our Father is in business, every day, feeding birds. Ps 104 says that when lions roar, they are asking God for food. And God feeds them, too. If God is active out there, taking care of birds, says Jesus, how much more is he active, taking care of you? Yet I tend to believe that it is all up to us, THAT's why I worry.

4, Does Worrying Help? (6:27)

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

Jesus never says that there are no reasons to worry. He gives reasons why we should not worry, but he does not say there are not reasons for worry. The last line of our text will say, *each day has enough trouble of its own.* Lot's of reasons to worry, keep that clear.

That's true. Jesus, the cheerful pessimist, says there will be trouble every day. Jesus is not teaching a way to harness the power of God to get rid of the trouble. Jesus is giving us a way to live each of these troubled days aimed toward Father.

So this line, *who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life*, gives one little reason not to worry that Jesus just had to add: it doesn't help. Worrying does not help.

Worrying is a way of trying to manage the troubles of the future. We try to figure out what we'll do about the troubles of the future, how we can control the situation. Give up, says Jesus. You can't manage or control it. Father will be there. Let it go.

5, What does God do with Flowers? (6:28-30)

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 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 cloth you, O you little-faiths?

Most of us are attracted to flowers. They are wonderful, and in so many different ways. When you look at a striking flower, how exactly is God responsible for that? I thought God made prairie roses and violets to look like that, built it into their genetic code, and so they look like wild roses and like violets. Nice work God.

But that does me no good if I'm worried about having enough. I could not absorb the Lord's teaching here, because I did not see creation as he saw it. Jesus thinks I can point my finger at any bird, and say, "that bird is eating today because God is feeding it." I can point at any flower and say, "that flower looks like that because God clothed that flower."

These verses have changed my view of God's presence in Creation more than any other Scripture. Jesus is trying to teach us not to worry about our needs, and he is basing it on the care Father gives to all Creation. Jesus assumes that we are the most valuable part of Father's creation, and whatever Father does for the rest, he'll do more for us.

Here's a challenge: read over the last ten verses of Matthew 6, and try to grasp how Jesus looks at God's care of his creation. I urge you to change your view of God's creation care, as much as you need to, for Jesus words to make sense.

What must God be doing with birds and flowers for this section to have teeth, for this section to make sense and give us reason to relax about having enough? What does Jesus think? Do I trust him enough to live that way?

By the way, the way Jesus says this means that Father is not a scrooge about clothes, that Father likes nice clothes, that Father has some appreciation for colour and shape and line, and that we are not always required to be purely utilitarian. Not that we ever are. God clothes the flowers better than Solomon clothed himself, and God clothes us!

6, Seek First the Father's Kingdom (6:31-33)

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. But seek first Father's kingdom and Father's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

For Jesus, worrying about having enough, and running after having enough, are the same thing. Our Lord is not that offended if we feel anxious or worried about having enough. It's unfortunate, and not fun, but he's not telling us to feel better.

What Jesus really means is, "don't pursue having enough, rather, pursue your Father's kingdom and righteousness." So even if you are worried about not having enough, live as if you trust God completely. What are we pursuing, that is the question, having enough ourselves, or our Father's kingdom and righteousness? What are we after?

Worry can turn us into living like pagans. Living like a pagan is frantically trying to make sure we have enough. Jesus says, don't let that happen.

Your Father knows what you need, he will provide, he takes care of birds, he takes care of flowers, he cares a lot more about you, and all these things will be given to you as well. Make your first priority his kingdom and his righteousness.

7, What about work?

Don't we provide for ourselves by working? Jesus was talking to two kinds of followers here, followers like the Peter and Andrew and James and John, who left jobs to follow Christ, as well as others like Mary and Martha and Lazarus, who kept their jobs.

Work itself is the normal way in which we take what the Father gives. Remember that the strength and ability to work come from God.

Moses said this to Israel: *You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth* (Deut 8:17-18). God gives ability to work!

God says to us in Ephesians, *he who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need* (4:28). In 2 Thess 3:10 Paul writes: *Even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."*

So the normal way to follow Jesus is to work honourably at a "regular job." Some others, like Peter, were called away from regular jobs to serve by preaching and teaching.

But all must work, and the rule applies to all: *if a man will not work, he shall not eat*. Even the apostles, when the Lord sent them out: the worker earns his wage. They did not live on charity, they had earned what people gave them.

The birds that God feeds must work. That does not mean God is not feeding them. Work is how we take the food and shelter from God's hands, and the strength to work itself, and ability itself, are themselves daily gifts from God. Moses says to us: Remember this!

And some people want to work but for some reason cannot. That has always been true, and God takes care of those people as well.

The pagans work, and God's people work. No difference there. God provides for birds and flowers, and God provides for the pagans as well as his children (Acts 14, 17). But the pagans run after these things, and God's children do not. They have a different focus.

It is entirely possible for us to work hard at our jobs **and** to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. That is the normal situation, and that's what Jesus had in mind. *To do that, though, we must stop worrying about the necessities of life*, and trust the Father who designs and gives life to each flower, and who feeds every bird.

8, Jesus the Cheerful Pessimist (6:34)

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

You can worry, says Jesus, but only about today. Each day has plenty of troubles. Today, you can worry about today's troubles. There were be enough troubles tomorrow, that's for sure, plenty of troubles tomorrow, count on it. But today has plenty of its own, so only worry about today's troubles. Then Jesus gives us a big grin. Amen.

PRAYER: Our Father, this is May, and all around us, you are making sure the birds have enough to eat. Some flowers are just beginning, and you are in our yards, and in the fields and forests, clothing the flowers and feeding the birds. And I am inside my house, anxious about having enough, and how I will make this work. For all the times you've taken care of us in the past, we thank you. For all the days when you gave us energy to work and provide, we thank you. For all the days when we could not see how this would work out, but it did, we thank you. Father, that you know what we need, and you're on it, we thank you. Lord Jesus, we believe what you said here, help our unbelief. Amen.

BENEDICTION: 'May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord show you his favor and give you his peace. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.