

## The Great Physician's Prescription for Peace Matthew 6:25-34

The Scottish professor and preacher James S. Stewart once made a helpful distinction between the foreground and the background of life. He used the metaphor of a painting and said that life has both a foreground and a background.

### Painting

The foreground are the things that are right in front of us. They are so 'in front of us' that the background is diminished if not made invisible.

Jesus talks about this very thing – a foreground and background of life and in so doing, provides us with a template for living peacefully in a Covid-19 world when he says -

**Matthew 6:25-34** - *Therefore I tell you, 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. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

- a) *Do not be anxious about your life*
- b) *Seek first the kingdom of God*

### **First: The Foreground: Covid-19 and its Anxieties**

Three times in this passage, Jesus reminds us not to be anxious – 24, 31, 34.

- a) **Life is more than food. 25**

The coronavirus is making this truth a reality. The 10 person restriction is reminding us what is really important in life.

**John 4:34 - "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."**

God lives in eternal community. Christianity is all about a relationship and relationships. We are learning, aren't we, that relationships are 'meat' to us. We need each other and we need each

other in ways you may not first think of. It's not that you need others for you as much as others need you...for you. Let me explain,

Jesus tells us that anxiety is caused by thinking too much about ourselves –

25 - *“your life...what you will eat...you will drink...your body....what you will put on...”*

31 – *What will we eat, what will we drink, what will we wear?*

What questions you are asking will determine your mental and emotional health.

***The health of your soul is determined by the object of your attention.***

Instead of thinking about your health, think about the well-being of others. As we trust God without health, we can then focus on the health of others. We're not only washing our hands to keep from getting sick. We're washing our hands to help other people stay healthy.'

- The picture Jesus gives us is of a pet, and in particular birds.

V 26 - *Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*

God naturally cares for his creation and no bird goes unnoticed. In the same way, God cares for you.

- The picture Jesus gives us is of a garden

28-30 - *Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you,*

Spring is springing up and we are all watching our yards and gardens for the first signs of new life. God is rebirthing the earth because He is a faithful Creator.

**God is caring for you.  
You can care for others.**

## **Second: The Background – Faith in God**

With all of this anxiety in the foreground, Jesus is reminding us that there is a background to life.

- It all comes down to faith – **30 – “O you of little faith.”**

Covid-19 and all of its anxieties may have a way of eliminating our view of God but God as the background of all life.

**We need to filter all of our anxiety through the grid of faith in the God of the Bible.**

The problem is that the foreground is so present, so real and so demanding that I forget to look behind it all. I forget that there is a foreground and a background to God's painting of my life.

Where is God? Where is Jesus in the midst of my anxiety?

Actually, because Jesus is omnipresent, he is moving throughout the fore, middle and back ground of our lives. Let me demonstrate that -

John 2 – Jesus attends the wedding at Cana and turns water into wine. What joy.

John 11 – Jesus attends the funeral in Bethany and turns death into life. What sorrow.

Where is God? With me. With me at the wedding. With me at the funeral. With me in my church on Sunday. With me in my home on Sunday. The God who died at our touch understands what touches us.

**Jesus is the God of Good Friday and Easter Sunday.**

**He is the God of our gathering and He is the God of our seclusion.**

**The real source of anxiety is 'me' and my perspective.**

**The cure to anxiety is 'God' and his perspective.**

We have to look beyond the horizon of the foreground to see what towers in the background.

### **Picture**

Look at the picture again. Between the foreground and the background is a middle ground; in our context the connection between Covid-19 and God. What is that middle ground in this passage?

**Third: The Middle Ground – Seeking God's Kingdom**

It's amazing to me how Covid-19 applicable this text is for us.

**a) Now is the time to be really righteous – in your home. 1-4**

GOSPEL: Jesus said that to get into heaven, our righteousness has to exceed that of the Pharisees (Matt 5:20). The Pharisees were publicly but not privately righteous (Matt 23:2). But

they were considered the most righteous people – “separate ones” – “He who is separate.” How can our righteousness exceed that? It can’t. But Jesus’s does!

2 Cor 5:21 – (The Great Exchange) – *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

- b) Now is the time to really pray. 5-14
- c) Now is the time to really fast. 16-17
- d) Now is the time to really give. 19-21

Giving is first an attitude and then an action. It is an attitude of faith in God and trust in him. It is gathering just enough manna for the day and trusting God to provide tomorrow. Can you do it? The generation that balked at Kadesh-Barnea is the generation that died in the wilderness. Is God trustworthy?

You may think this is contrary to reason but faith, but faith, in the Bible, directs reason. Faith says, *“It is the most reasonable thing to obey God.”* God’s commands are reasonable because they save the ‘whole’ person and not just part of us; not just our physical bodies, or our minds or emotions, not just our finances or our marriages – God saves the whole person. This is what Jesus meant when he said, *“...what does it profit you, if you gain the whole world but lose your soul”* (Mark 8:36).

- e) Now is the time to really see. 22-23
- f) Now is the time to really serve. 24
- g) Now is the time to really seek God’s kingdom. 33
- h) Now is the time to really be at peace. 34

All of these things are not individual. They are not separate. They are all part of the whole picture; foreground and background.

Add each of them together and they create peace.

This is Jesus’s peace plan. It’s the Great Physician’s Prescription for Peace.

Peace is a by-product of putting Jesus and his kingdom first.

Practicing personal righteousness, praying, fasting, giving, seeing, serving....this is what it means to seek God’s kingdom. And this is what it means to be at peace.

### **Conclusion:**

The atheist, Christopher Hitchens (The Faith of Christopher Hitchens) once wrote, *“There is no escape from anxiety.”* Of course, Mr. Hitchens didn’t know the Jesus that you know.

How do you escape anxiety?

Seek God's kingdom. How do I seek God's kingdom? Jesus has made you a list of disciplines that will free you from anxiety.

**Community Groups:**

- 1 – How is your reading through the Bible?
- 2 – What other spiritual disciplines are you exercising during this pandemic?
- 3 – What might the elders start or do more of to encourage you?
- 4 – How are you ministering to those around you?
- 5 - Read the text.
- 6 – What are the things Jesus mentions in this text that make us anxious/
- 7 – What is God's remedy for each of them?
- 8 – What does this sentence mean? "The health of your soul is determined by the object of your attention."
- 9 – How is God the God of Good Friday and Easter Sunday?
- 10 – Why am I a source of my own anxiety?
- 11 – List the disciplines Jesus mentions in verses 5-34.
- 12 – Which of these is the easiest to practice?
- 13 – Which of these is the hardest to practice?
- 14 – What are you 'seeing' differently as a result of Covid-19?
- 15 – How does focusing on God's kingdom, as expressed in these disciplines, keep us from discouragement?
- 16 – What is your big takeaway from this text?