



The Sermon on the Mount Study
Bible Study Session 21
Matthew 6:25-34 : Topic 20

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Greek NT

6.25 Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν, μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν τί φάγητε [ἢ τί πίητε], μηδὲ τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν τί ἐνδύσθητε. οὐχὶ ἡ ψυχὴ πλεῖον ἐστὶν τῆς τροφῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος; 6.26 ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὅτι οὐ σπεύρουσιν οὐδὲ θερίζουσιν οὐδὲ συνάγουσιν εἰς ἀποθήκας, καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τρέφει αὐτά· οὐχ ὑμεῖς μᾶλλον διαφέρετε αὐτῶν; 6.27 τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν μεριμνῶν δύνата προσθεῖναι ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ πῆχυν ἓνα; 6.28 καὶ περὶ ἐνδύματος τί μεριμνᾶτε; καταμάθετε τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ πῶς αὐξάνουσιν· οὐ κοπιῶσιν οὐδὲ νήθουσιν· 6.29 λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδὲ Σολομῶν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ περιεβάλετο ὡς ἐν τούτων. 6.30 εἰ δὲ τὸν χόρτον τοῦ ἀγροῦ σημερον ὄντα καὶ αὔριον εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον ὁ θεὸς οὕτως ἀμφιένυσιν, οὐ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ὑμᾶς, ὀλιγόπιστοι 6.31 μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε λέγοντες Τί φάγωμεν; ἢ, Τί πίωμεν; ἢ, Τί περιβαλώμεθα; 6.32 πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητοῦσιν· οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος ὅτι χρῆζετε τούτων ἀπάντων. 6.33 ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν. 6.34 μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε εἰς τὴν αὔριον, ἢ γὰρ αὔριον μεριμνήσει ἑαυτῆς· ἀρκετὸν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἡ κακία αὐτῆς.

Gute Nachricht Bibel

25 Darum sage ich euch: Macht euch keine Sorgen um euer Leben, ob ihr etwas zu essen oder zu trinken habt, und um euren Leib, ob ihr etwas anzuziehen habt! Das Leben ist mehr als Essen und Trinken, und der Leib ist mehr als die Kleidung! 26 Seht euch die Vögel an! Sie säen nicht, sie ernten nicht, sie sammeln keine Vorräte – aber euer Vater im Himmel sorgt für sie. Und ihr seid ihm doch viel mehr wert als Vögel! 27 Wer von euch kann durch Sorgen sein Leben auch nur um einen Tag verlängern? 28 Und warum macht ihr euch Sorgen um das, was ihr anziehen sollt? Seht, wie die Blumen auf den Feldern wachsen! Sie arbeiten nicht und machen sich keine Kleider, 29 doch ich sage euch: Nicht einmal Salomo bei all seinem Reichtum war so prächtig gekleidet wie irgendeine von ihnen. 30 Wenn Gott sogar die Feldblumen so ausstattet, die heute blühen und morgen verbrannt werden, wird er sich dann nicht erst recht um euch kümmern? Habt ihr so wenig Vertrauen? 31 Also macht euch keine Sorgen! Fragt nicht: 'Was sollen wir essen?' 'Was sollen wir trinken?' 'Was sollen wir anziehen?' 32 Mit all dem plagen sich Menschen, die Gott nicht kennen. Euer Vater im Himmel weiß, dass ihr all das braucht. 33 Sorgt euch zuerst darum, dass ihr euch seiner Herrschaft unterstellt, und tut, was er verlangt, dann wird er euch schon mit all dem anderen versorgen. 34 Quält euch also nicht mit Gedanken an morgen; der morgige Tag wird für sich selber sorgen. Es genügt, dass jeder Tag seine eigene Last hat.

NRSV

25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 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? 27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

NLT

25 So I tell you, don't worry about everyday life – whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Doesn't life consist of more than food and clothing? 26 Look at the birds. They don't need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than they are. 27 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not. 28 "And why worry about your clothes? Look at the lilies 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 flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you? You have so little faith! 31 "So don't worry about having enough food or drink or clothing. 32 Why be like the pagans who are so deeply concerned about these things? Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, 33 and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern. 34 So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.

The Study of the Text:¹

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

This lengthy passage touches on one of the basic human instincts: physical survival. Arranged in eloquent semi-poetic structure, the text challenges the disciple to focus on God rather than on the basics of food, clothing and shelter. In a beautifully inspiring manner we are urged to make this shift as we pray for God to grant us our 'daily bread' in the fourth petition of the Model Prayer (cf. 6:11). Unqualified trust in God to provide is essential for this petition to have legitimacy.

In contrast, Luke uses this piece of Q-sayings of Jesus in a different context in Lk. 12:22-31.² The same message of Jesus becomes the application of the Parable of the Rich Fool (Lk. 12:13-21) to the disciples (cf. v. 22).³ Luke adds in vv. 32-34 additional pieces of the Jesus tradition to round out the application of the parable to His disciples. This text needs to be considered with Matt. 6:25-34 in order to gain more complete understanding of both texts.⁴

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

²NRSV: "22 Then turning to his disciples, Jesus said, 'So I tell you, don't worry about everyday life – whether you have enough food to eat or clothes to wear. 23 For life consists of far more than food and clothing. 24 Look at the ravens. They don't need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because God feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than any birds! 25 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not! 26 And if worry can't do little things like that, what's the use of worrying over bigger things? 27 Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. 28 And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you? You have so little faith! 29 And don't worry about food – what to eat and drink. Don't worry whether God will provide it for you. 30 These things dominate the thoughts of most people, but your Father already knows your needs. 31 He will give you all you need from day to day if you make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.

32 'So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom.

33 'Sell what you have and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven have no holes in them. Your treasure will be safe – no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. 34 Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be.'

³"This passage [Mt. 6:25-34], except for the last verse (v 34), is paralleled fairly closely in Luke 12:22-31. Apart from very minor differences, the following may be noted: Matthew prefers the probably original rhetorical questions in vv 25 and 30, whereas Luke recasts the material into indicative statements (12:23, 28); Matthew has added the reference to "what you drink" (although some MSS lack this); Luke's question in 12:26, "If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that [add a cubit to one's life-span], why are you anxious about the rest?" is lacking in Matthew, in which the question at this point refers to what follows ("Why are you anxious about clothing?") rather than to what precedes; for Luke's κόρακας, "ravens," Matthew has the more inclusive πετεινά, "birds" (v 26); Luke has ὁ θεός for Matthew's characteristic ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος, "your heavenly Father" (cf. v 32, where Luke has simply "your Father," 12:30); Matthew alone has the summarizing μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε λέγοντες, "Do not therefore be anxious, saying" (v 31); Luke has τοῦ κόσμου, "of the world" (12:30) modifying "the Gentiles," words not found in Matt 6:32; only Matthew uses πάντων and πάντα, "all," to modify "these things" in vv 32 and 33; finally, in v 33 only Matthew has πρῶτον, "first," modifying "seek" and the words καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ, "and his righteousness." In many of these changes, especially the last, we can see Matthew's redactional activity, reflecting his special interests and characteristic terminology. It may be, however, that at points Matthew reflects a more primitive form, e.g., in the strong parallelism, which is not so apparent in Luke, and in the rhetorical questions. Without question, this passage in Matthew and Luke derives ultimately from the same source, that is, Q. But a number of the many smaller differences appear to be just what might occur through the influence of particular separate, though similar, oral traditions." [Donald A. Hagner, vol. 33A, *Word Biblical Commentary : Matthew 1-13, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 160.]

⁴Other NT texts with similar themes include the following:

Phil. 4:6-7 (NRSV): "6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

1 Pet. 5:7 (NRSV): "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you."

James 4:13-17 (NRSV): "13 Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.' 14 Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.' 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. 17 Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin."

Historical Context:

Hunger and poverty⁵ in the ancient world were rather extensive. Few social nets existed to address such problems in times of drought and warfare, which were the major causes of famine. Only the threat of severe social rebellion by the masses of hungry peasants prompted political rulers to address the news in dire circumstances. Otherwise, the poor were on their own and many starved to death.⁶ The issue of taking care of the poor was addressed earlier in our studies on the Sermon,⁷ consequently we will touch here on the issue of poverty in the ancient world. A particularly helpful and insightful summary of the biblical picture of poverty is provided in the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*:

Although descriptions of the circumstances and explicit causes of poverty are sometimes vague, many passages use verbs that graphically communicate that the poor are often victims of greed, lust for power and manipulation within the legal system. The prophets, for instance, denounce leaders and a society that “crush,” “deprive,” “destroy,” “grind,” “trample on” and “oppress” the poor (e.g., Is 3:14–15; 32:6–7; Amos 4:1; 8:4). The fundamental image of helplessness is reinforced by OT legislation designed to succor those exploited in the courts and to facilitate restitution for those forced to sell their land and their family members into slavery, because of overwhelming debt (Ex 23:6–13; Lev 25; Deut 15; cf. 2 Kings 8:1–6; Neh 5). Poverty can leave a person abandoned by neighbors, friends and family (Prov 14:20; 19:4, 7).

Several biblical texts present more extensive portraits of the conditions of poverty. Each underscores that the poor are prey to the cruelty of those in power. They often have no recourse to anyone but God. The opening chapters of Exodus describe the groaning of the Israelites under the Egyptian yoke: forced labor and infanticide mark their existence as slaves under Pharaoh. In Nathan’s parable of rebuke to David, he tells of a poor man whose beloved lamb is snatched away by a wealthy neighbor (2 Sam 12:1–10). Job 24 depicts the desperate lot of the poor who lack clothing, search for food and are taken advantage of in their menial jobs. Jesus’ description of the agony of the sick beggar Lazarus also emphasizes the callousness of the rich and mighty (Lk 16:19–31). Throughout the Bible, God is portrayed as One who responds to the cries of the poor, especially the needy among his people.

Jesus repeatedly demonstrates his concern for the less fortunate. In the sermon at Nazareth he declares that he has come to bring good news to the poor (Lk 4:16–21; cf. 7:18–23; Mt 25:31–46 and par.). Even though this passage also refers to spiritual realities and needs, there can be no denying that the feeding of the hungry and the healing of the sick are important elements of Jesus’ ministry.

Stark realities of poverty also permeate the accounts of the early church. Indeed, it was the poor who often responded to the gospel message (1 Cor 1:26–29). Believers share food and possessions and organize themselves to take care of the widows (Acts 2; 4; 6; 1 Tim 5); they are called to recognize the common spiritual bond between slaves and free (e.g., Gal 3:28; Eph 6:5–9) and are reminded of their obligation to help alleviate the poverty of even distant churches (Rom 15:25–27; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8). James in particular portrays the critical state of the poor, who have no food, clothes or decent wages (Jas 2:1–19; 5:1–6).

The ancient Hebrew and subsequent Jewish focus on poverty tends to emphasize the responsibility of society to eliminate poverty and to help those trapped in poverty. Some attention to the causes of poverty are present in the biblical texts, but this is a secondary point. Three groups of people tend to be singled out as especially vulnerable to poverty: widows, orphans, and foreigners living among the Jews.⁸ Their

⁵Officially defined in modern terms by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “**1.** the state of being extremely poor. **2.** the renunciation of the right to individual ownership of property as part of a religious vow. **3.** the state of being insufficient in amount.” Ancient definitions will differ according to the culture and the individual writer.

⁶Note the saying of the Roman orator Cicero: “What’s the use of being kind to a poor man?”

⁷The aspect of welfare assistance to the poverty stricken in the ancient world was address in study 14 on Matthew 6:2-4 under Almsgiving.

⁸“Three groups within Israelite society — widows, orphans, and strangers — experienced poverty as particularly harsh. In a society structured upon the male as the worker, the widow and orphan struggled to survive: powerless, they depended upon the good will of others (Deut. 24:17). The strangers, as ones who did not belong, had no bonds to their new society. These groups shared a common poverty: a lack of status whereby the powerful and unscrupulous took advantage. Concern is expressed for their precarious social status (Prov. 31:9; Ps. 82:3) — what others had done to them to cause their poverty (Ps. 10:2; Isa. 32:7).

“In addition to economic considerations the NT also focuses on the lack of honor, social status, and powerlessness which led to the oppression of the poor. The Epistle of James stands out as a writing concerned for the poor, who lack power — they are at the mercy of the rich. The rich “have dishonored the poor” who have no rights — the poor are brought to court by the rich (Jas. 2:6). The rich are boastful and arrogant, relying solely upon their own power (Jas. 4:13–17). Wealth has brought

helplessness and dependency on others made them prone to poverty.

Two Greek words with related forms in the New Testament refer to poverty:⁹ πτωχεία and ὑστέρησις. The first one is the more significant of the two in referring to poverty in the first Christian century.¹⁰

In the NT πτωχός and not πένης (→ 40, 9 ff.)¹⁵⁵ is the usual term for the poor.¹⁵⁶ The word occurs 31–35 times. It is most common in the Gospels, esp. the Synoptics (Mk. 4–5 times, Mt. 4–5, Lk. 10).¹⁵⁷ This is in acc. with the contents. Outside these the distribution is fairly even. The only surprising factor is the complete absence of the word from Ac.,¹⁵⁸ esp. in comparison with the common use in Lk. (6 times in material peculiar to Lk.).¹¹

The word group based on πτωχεία stresses extreme lack in the context of helplessness. This stands in contrast to πένης (pénēs) which refers to lack but also to the capability of providing for oneself. Jesus will talk about poverty more than all of the apostles in their writings. The word group never occurs in the Pauline materials. A concordance search of the English word ‘poor’ in the NRSV produces 36 references, and a quick survey of these verses is helpful for understanding the over arching perspective in the New Testament.¹² The presence of poverty stricken individuals among the Jews is assumed in the New Testament. And in a fashion typical of the teachings of the Old Testament, Christian ministry to help the poverty stricken is set forth in general terms.

The religious posture of looking to God to take care of basic physical needs is foundational to the Jewish heritage from the Old Testament. This does not in any way preclude hard work and vigorous efforts to ‘make a living’ for one’s self and one’s family.¹³ This Jewish perspective is especially strong in Paul’s admonition to the Thessalonian believers who refused to continue working so they could ‘watch for the Lord’s return’ (2 Thess. 3:10-12, NRSV):

10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: **Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.** 11 For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

But fundamental is the conviction that ultimately everything comes from God and that His people must always look to Him as the ultimate source of the basics of living.

Literary Aspects:

The literary nature of vv. 25-34 are important considerations in the interpretive process. Perspectives developed here will play a significant role in the interpretive conclusions gleaned from the wording of the text.

honor to the rich and shame to the poor (Jas. 2:1–7). True religion is defined as “caring for orphans and widows in their distress” (Jas. 1:27) — two groups identified with the poor in the OT because they have no rights or power to defend themselves.” [David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1070. S.V. “Poor”]

⁹“The Bible uses a variety of words for “poor” and “poverty.” These terms have been the subject of etymological studies and research into possible socioeconomic and political backgrounds, as well as the focus of ethical discussions and the theologies of liberation. Both testaments offer vivid pictures of the plight and afflictions of the poor. In Scripture numerous groups suffer the pains of want and injustice: peasant farmers, wage laborers, widows, orphans and foreigners.” [Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, c1998), 657. S.V. “Poverty.”]

¹⁰Cf. πτωχεία (ptōcheía), ‘poverty’ (2x); πτωχεύω (ptōcheúō), ‘be/become poor’ (1x); πτωχός (ptōchós), ‘poor,’ ‘beggar’ (35x). With a total of just 38 instances throughout the NT, one realizes that the topic of ‘poverty’ is not a major theme in the New Testament.

¹¹Ernst Bammel, “πτωχός, † πτωχεία, † πτωχεύω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vols. 5-9 Edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 Compiled by Ronald Pitkin., ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 6:885-915.

¹²Also helpful is to compare the OT instances (132x) of ‘poor’ to those in the NT (36). Important also is a concordance search of the word ‘poverty’ with a total of 17 instances (OT= 12x; NT= 5x). The frequencies are based on the NRSV. Different translations will produce slightly different frequencies, since different English words are often used to translate the same Greek word.

¹³Compare the following OT admonitions, which reflect this attitude with different words:

Prov. 10:4-5 (NRSV): “4 A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. 5 A child who gathers in summer is prudent, but a child who sleeps in harvest brings shame.”

Prov. 20:13 (NRSV): “Do not love sleep, or else you will come to poverty; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread.”

Literary Form:

The genre of vv. 25-34, together with the Luke 12:22-31 parallel, falls into the general category of *Logion Jesu*, i.e., a Saying of Jesus. It also has the ancient characteristics of paraenesis, i.e., moral admonition. Particularly important is the very creative use of parabolic imagery where human existence is compared to the natural world of birds and flowers. Not to be overlooked here is the theological assumption of God as the Creator of all life. This use of imagery adds dramatic vividness and intensity to the points that Jesus sought to make about worrying. This use of analogous language here is in line with the tendency of the Synoptic Gospel writers to cast most of Jesus’ teachings in parables.

Also to be noted is the use of the ancient Hebrew emphasis on trust in God to take care of physical needs as expressed in various passages in the Old Testament:

Psalm 127:2 (NRSV): “It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives sleep to his beloved.”

Isaiah 32:17 (NRSV): “The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.”

Such texts formed the conceptual background to Jesus’ emphasis and communicated to Matthew’s Jewish Christian audience the continuity of Jesus’ teachings with those in the Old Testament.

Literary Setting:

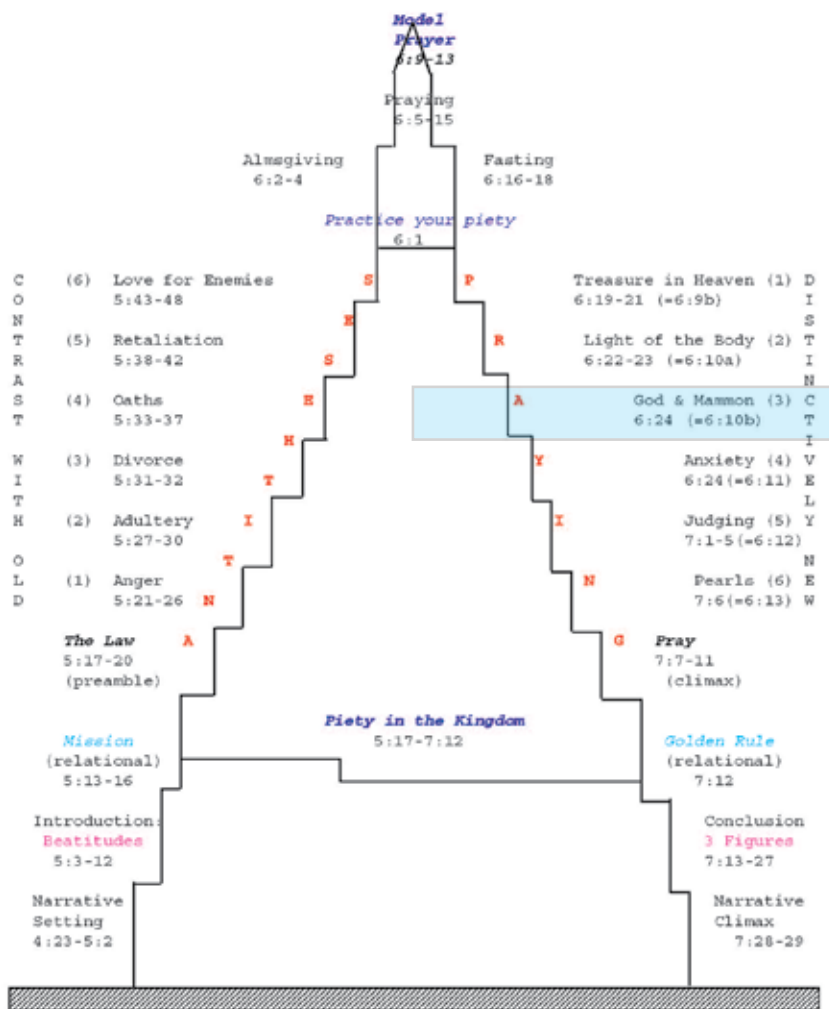
The literary context of 6:25-34 has two levels of significance. At the **first level** is its relationship to 6:19-24. The connection between the two passages is directly stated in the causal prepositional phrase at the beginning in verse 25: “Because of this” (διὰ τοῦτο). The reference in ‘this’ (τοῦτο) reaches back to the preceding three pericopes, vv. 19-21, 22-23, & 24, as a unitary expression. The causal idea expressed by διὰ defines the connection as the first segment, vv. 19-24, as laying the foundation for the second segment, vv. 25-34. What comes second is based on the previous truths set forth in the first segment. Consequently, the uniform focus on God and commitment to Him in vv. 19-24 stands as the basis for Jesus’ admonitions to not worry. Who God is and how He is committed to His creation make worrying by the disciple not only irrelevant but an expression of inadequate trust in this God. Therefore, confidence in God’s care of His people grows out of our commitment to God and our submission to His authority over our life.

Secondly, vv. 25-34 as a prayer commentary by Jesus, stands as the obligation we bring to the fourth prayer petition in the Model Prayer in 6:11:

“Give us this day our daily bread.” (τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον).

Asking God to take care of our basic physical needs and then worrying about whether we are going to have those needs met are utterly contradictory postures. Worrying about our physical needs and praying about them are like trying to mix oil and water! When we approach God with the request to

The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 4:23-7:29



Source: Lorin I. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount—Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988), 320. Adapted from Gunter Bonkamm, “Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt,” *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432.

meet our basic needs, we must bring with that petition a fundamental confidence in the God who takes care of His creation, and especially His people. Without such trust in God our petition rings hollow and hypocritical. Certainly it is a petition that dishonors God!

Literary Structure:

The block diagram illustrates clearly how the ideas hang together to form a unit of expression.

6:25 Because of this
107 **I tell you,**
Don't worry
about your life,
what you eat,
or
what you drink,
neither about your body,
what you wear.

Your life certainly isn't about food, is it,
and
your body certainly isn't about clothes, is it?

108 6:26 **Look closely**
at the birds of the sky,
that they do not sow
neither
do they harvest,
nor
do they gather
into barns.
and
109 **your Heavenly Father feeds them;**
110 **are you not worth more than they?**

6:27 and
111 **who among you can add one inch to his height¹⁴**
by worrying?

6:28 And
about clothes
112 **why do you worry?**
113 **Consider the lilies of the field,**
how they grow;
114 **they don't work hard,**
nor
115 **do they spin,**
6:29 but
116 **I tell you,**
in all his glory
that not even Solomon...was so clothed.
like one of these

6:30 But
if God so clothes the grass of the field,
which exists today
and
which is thrown...tomorrow,
into the oven

¹⁴Or, *who among you can add one hour to his life, by worrying?*

117 **how much more will He not clothe you,**
 o you of little faith?

6:31 Therefore

118 **don't worry,**
 by saying,
 What shall we eat?
 or
 What shall we drink?
 or
 What shall we wear?

6:32 For

119 **all these things do the pagans seek after;**
 for

120 **your Heavenly Father knows**
 that you need all these things.

6:33 But

121 **seek first the Kingdom of God**
 and
 His righteousness,
 and

122 **all these things will be given to you.**

6:34 Therefore

123 **don't worry,**
 about tomorrow,
 for

124 **tomorrow will worry about itself;**

125 **sufficient for the day is its evil.**

Clearly the central theme of the text is concerning worry, as defined by the fivefold use of the Greek verb μεριμνάω. This verb serves as the organizing stack pole around which the passage is built. Couched in either intensive admonitions (3x) or in a rhetorical question (1x), the verb intensely raises the issue of individual worrying about the basics of physical existence.

The core organizational structure of the passage is built around the threefold use of the admonition, 'Don't worry,' (μὴ μεριμνᾶτε & μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε) that is found in statements 107, 118, and 123. The three sections are inner connected through the use of the inferential conjunction οὖν ("therefore") in the second and third admonitions. The movement goes from "don't worry about your life" (v. 25) to "don't worry by saying..." (v. 31) to "don't worry about tomorrow" (v. 34). The second admonition is contextually worry about your life, but the comparison is to Gentiles rather than to birds and flowers as is found in the first one. The third admonition extends the concept of worrying about the future in regard to these basic needs in life. Some commentators see it as a postscript to the passage, since this is not present in the Lukan parallel text. Perhaps so, but the extension from today to tomorrow, especially in regard to basic human needs, seems rather natural and logical.

Exegesis of the Text:

The threefold division of the text, as charted out above, produces a threefold discussion of the text's meaning. The central theme of worry merits careful consideration at the outset in order to carefully define the boundaries of the meaning of the scripture text.

The meaning of worry: The use of the Greek verb μεριμνάω five times in 6:25-34 clearly defines the central theme of this passage: 1) μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν ["do not worry about your life"]; 2) μεριμνῶν ["by worrying"]; 3) καὶ περὶ ἐνδύματος τί μεριμνᾶτε ["why do you worry about clothing"]; 4) μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε λέγοντες ["do not worry, saying,"]; 5) μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε εἰς τὴν αὔριον ["do not worry about tomorrow"]. In the first three instances the imperative verb, the participle, and the indicative verb are in the present

tense, defining an ongoing attitude and posture. But in the fourth and fifth instances Matthew shifts to the Aorist tense imperative verb, which intensifies the admonition as a prohibition. The conceptual difference between the first admonition (v. 25) in the present tense and the second (v. 31) and third (v. 34) admonitions in the Aorist tense is essentially this: 1) Present tense: “Don’t be worrying” and 2) Aorist tense: “Don’t even think about worrying.”

The range of possible meanings for this Greek verb in the ancient world was rather wide, and included attitudes all the way from “to care for, about” (positive, +) to “be overly worried about” (negative, -). And this + to - range of meanings is present in the New Testament as well.¹⁵ When the negative meaning is used, the meaning typically is defining undue worry or apprehension about something.¹⁶ Inside the New Testament *μεριμνάω* is used 19 times.¹⁷



¹⁵ *to be apprehensive, have anxiety, be anxious, be (unduly) concerned (PTeb^t 315, 9 [II A.D.] γράφω ὅπως μὴ μεριμνήῃς; Ps 37:19) *μηδὲν have no anxiety* Phil 4:6 (WWeeda, Philipp. 4:6 en 7: TS^t 34, 1916, 326–35). *περί τινος* Mt 6:28; Lk 12:26; D^s 9:6. W. indir question foll: *πῶς ἢ τί λαλήσητε about how you are to speak or what you are to say* Mt 10:19; cp Lk 12:11 (cp ParJ^e 6:15 *τὸ πῶς ἀποστειλῆς πρὸς Ἰερειάν*). W. dat and a question foll: *μὴ μεριμνάτε τῇ ψυχῇ* (dat of advantage: *for your life*, B-D-^F §188, 1; Rob 539) *ὑμῶν τί φάγητε* Mt 6:25; Lk 12:22. Abs. Mt 6:31; in ptc (s. Mlt 230) Mt 6:27; Lk 12:25. Beside *θορυβάζεσθαι περί πολλά* of the distracting cares of housekeeping 10:41 (the text is uncertain; s. Zahⁿ and EKlostermann, also FSträhl, Krit. u. exeget. Beleuchtung von Lk 10:41f: SchT^Z 4, 1887, 116–23). *εἰς τὴν αὔριον do not worry about tomorrow* Mt 6:34a.

*to attend to, care for, be concerned about *τι someth* (Sop^h, loc. cit.; cp Bar 3:18) *τὰ τοῦ κυρίου the Lord’s work* 1 Cor 7:32; 34a. *τὰ τοῦ κόσμου* vss. 33, 34b. *τὰ περί τινος someone’s welfare* Phil 2:20. *ἢ αὔριον μεριμνήσει ἑαυτῆς will look after itself* (Itala ‘sibi’.—B-D-^F §176, 2; Rob 509) Mt 6:34b (v.l *τὰ ἑαυτῆς* care about its own concerns). *τὶ ὑπὲρ τινος: ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων μεριμνώσιν τὰ μέλη that the parts may have the same concern for one another* 1 Cor 12:25.—DEL^G s.v *μέριμνα*. M-^M. T^W. [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 632.]

¹⁶Interestingly, quite a large number of Greek words are used to define undue worry. See the listings in Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996):

“**25.223** μέλει^b (only impersonal in the New Testament): to be particularly concerned about something, with the implication of some apprehension; **25.224** μέριμνα, ης ^f: a feeling of apprehension or distress in view of possible danger or misfortune; **25.225** μεριμνάω: (derivative of μέριμνα ‘worry,’ 25.224) to have an anxious concern, based on apprehension about possible danger or misfortune; **25.226** ἀμέριμνος, ον: pertaining to not being concerned or anxious; **25.227** προμεριμνάω: to be worried or anxious beforehand or in advance; **25.228** προσδοκῶ^a: to await with apprehension concerning impending danger or trouble; **25.229** πυρόομαι^b: (a figurative extension of meaning of πυρόομαι^a ‘to burn,’ 14.63) to be upset, with great concern and anxiety; **25.230** καταπονέομαι: to be distressed, with the implication of being worn out by such an experience; **25.231** ἀνασκευάζω: to cause someone distress and worry; **25.232** μετεωρίζομαι: to be very concerned about, with the implication of placing too much value upon something; **25.232** μετεωρίζομαι: to be very concerned about, with the implication of placing too much value upon something; **25.233** σειώ^b: (a figurative extension of meaning of σειώ^a ‘to shake,’ 16.7) to cause extreme anxiety and apprehension, implying accompanying movement; **25.234** θορυβέομαι; θορυβάζομαι; τυρβάζομαι: to be emotionally upset by a concern or anxiety; **25.235** ὀδύνη, ης ^f: (a figurative extension of meaning of ὀδύνη ‘physical pain,’ not occurring in the N^T) a state of severe emotional anxiety and distress; **25.236** ὀδυνάομαι^b: (derivative of ὀδύνη ‘great distress,’ 25.235) to experience great distress or anxiety; **25.237** ἐξαπορέομαι: to be in extreme despair, implying both anxiety and fear; **5.238** περισπάομαι: (a figurative extension of meaning of περισπάομαι ‘to be drawn off from around,’ not occurring in the N^T) to be so overburdened by various distractions as to be worried and anxious; **25.239** ἐπίστασις^a, εως ^f: a state of prolonged concern and anxiety; **25.240** συνοχή, ης ^f: a state of mental distress, involving acute anxiety; **25.241** συνέχομαι^b: to experience great psychological pressure and anxiety; **25.242** σαλεύομαι: (a figurative extension of meaning of σαλεύω ‘to shake,’ 16.7) to become emotionally unsettled and distraught; **25.243** τάραχος^b, ου ^m: a state of acute distress and great anxiety, with the additional possible implications of dismay and confusion; **25.244** τάρασσω^b: (a figurative extension of meaning of τάρασσω^a ‘to stir up,’ 16.3) to cause acute emotional distress or turbulence; **25.245** ὑπωπιάζω^a: to cause great annoyance to and thus to wear someone out; **25.246** διατάρασσομαι: (similar in meaning to τάρασσω^b ‘to cause acute distress,’ 25.244, but probably somewhat more emphatic) to be mentally disturbed and thus deeply troubled; **25.247** ἀδημονέω: to be distressed and troubled, with the probable implication of anguish; **25.248** εἰρήνη^b, ης ^f: a state of freedom from anxiety and inner turmoil; **25.249** εἰρηνικός, ή, όν: pertaining to freedom from anxiety and inner turmoil; **25.250** τὴν μέριμναν ἐπιρίπτω ἐπί: (an idiom, literally ‘to cast cares upon’) to stop worrying and to put one’s trust in someone.”

¹⁷The noun form μέριμνα is used 6 times, and carries the meaning of “anxiety, worry, anxious concern.” [Louw-Nida, Page 8 of Bergpredigt Study

Various translations handle the verb in different ways, in the effort to communicate the ideas of Jesus in this text: “**Don’t worry**” (NirV; NCV; HCSB; Cotton Patch); “**do not worry**” (NRSV; NRSV rev. Int; NIV; NASB 95; NKJV; NET Bible; TNIV); “**not to worry**” (NLT); “not to be worried” (GNT); “**stop worrying**” (ISV; WuestNT); “**be not anxious**” (ASV); “**do not be anxious**” (ESV; RSV); “**Take no thought**” (KJV; AV 1873); “**don’t fuss**” (Message); “**Sorget nicht**” (LB 1912); “**Sorgt euch nicht**” (EU2; ZB 2007); “**Macht euch keine Sorgen**” (GNB); “**Ne vous inquiétez pas**” (BFC97); “**ne solliciti sitis**” (VLG; Vlg Clem). This range of translation expressions illustrates some of the challenges that Bible translators face in attempting to translate biblical words, in particular that express human attitudes and emotions.

Davies and Allison provide a helpful summation of the significance of this verb here in 6:25-34:¹⁸

The word refers primarily to an attitude, to mental anxiety (cf. 6:27; 10:19; Par. Jer. 6:15; Dupon^{19t} 3, pp. 286–7); but it is just possible that originally Jesus was telling his disciples not to put forth an effort, not to work save in preaching the gospel (cf. Mk 6:8; 1 Cor 9:14; so Schlatter^{20r}, pp. 225–7; Jeremias,²¹ *Parable*^{22s}, pp. 214–15). One could, perhaps, combine the two meanings: do not make worried efforts (cf. Guelich^{23h}, p. 336). In any event, the main point for Matthew is not in doubt. The wise believer will focus attention on the Father in heaven; and notwithstanding the inevitable troubles and frailties of human existence (cf. Ecclus 40:1–11; Ps.-Phoc²⁴ 116–21), he will cast aside all earthly cares. The disciple will let nothing interfere with finding the one pearl of great price (cf. 13:46). Compare As. Mos²⁵ 12:3; T. Is^{26s} 4; and T. Jo^{27b} 49:1, where Job’s daughter has her heart changed so as μηκέτι ἐνθυμηθῆναι τὰ κοσμικά (cf. 48:2; 50:2). All mental concentration will be aimed at spiritual matters (cf. Col 3:1–2), thus freeing one from bondage to the world (cf. 6:24; Ecclus 31:1).

Matthew could readily have thought of μεριμνάω as related to μερίζω and thus have connected anxiety with division within the self. This would link 6:25 well with the ἀπλοῦς in 6:22 and with the theme of serving two masters in 6:24.

For contentment with food and clothing, necessities which all must have, see 1 Tim 6:8 (cf. Ps.-Phoc²⁸ 6). Perhaps our evangelist will have thought of the Lord’s Prayer and the petition for bread. Having prayed the prayer of Jesus, how could one remain anxious?

What can be concluded then is that Jesus here is talking about an individual who becomes unduly fretful over the basics of day to day human existence. In a world where poverty and famine were common place, one can easily understand the Lord’s admonitions against such worry. In the extreme situations of poverty the ability to find food was very limited, and most folks were virtually helpless to find ways of surviving severe famine and poverty. Trust in God would be a viable option that even the most deprived beggar could turn to in times of need.

Don’t worry, vv. 25-30: “25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 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? 27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass

Ibid., 25:224]

The frequency of the verb: Matthew 7x; Luke 5x; 1 Corinthians 5x; Philippians 2x. The NRSV picks up only 10 of these with the English verb ‘worry’; the NASB limits the verb translation to ‘worry’ in only 9 places. The NLT, however, uses the English verb ‘worry’ in 20 places, going beyond just μεριμνάω.

For a listing of 17 of the 19 instances see the online NT Greek Lexicon at *Bible Study Tools* for ‘merimnao.’ Note: the inaccurate count is due to this Greek lexicon being based on an out-dated print lexicon and the Textus Receptus Greek text. Thus, it has limited value, but on occasion it can illustrate certain points in a helpful manner.

¹⁸W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 645–666.

¹⁹Dupon *J. Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, 3 vols., Paris, 1958, 1969, 1973.

²⁰Schlatter A. Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Matthäus*, 3rd ed., Stuttgart, 1948.

²¹Jeremias, J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (trans. of *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 1970), 2nd rev. ed., London, 1972.

²²*Parables* J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (trans. of *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, 1970), 2nd rev. ed., London, 1972.

²³Guelich *R. A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Waco, 1982.

²⁴Ps.-Phoc. Pseudo-Phocylides

²⁵As. Mos. Assumption of Moses

²⁶T. Iss Testament of Issachar

²⁷T. Job Testament of Job

²⁸Ps.-Phoc. Pseudo-Phocylides

of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith?” (6.25 Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν, μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν τί φάγητε [ἢ τί πίητε], μηδὲ τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν τί ἐνδύσθητε. οὐχὶ ἡ ψυχὴ πλεῖον ἐστὶν τῆς τροφῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἐνδύματος; 6.26 ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὅτι οὐ σπεύρουσιν οὐδὲ θερίζουσιν οὐδὲ συνάγουσιν εἰς ἀποθήκας, καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τρέφει αὐτά· οὐχ ὑμεῖς μᾶλλον διαφέρετε αὐτῶν; 6.27 τίς δὲ ἐξ ὑμῶν μεριμνῶν δύναται προσθεῖναι ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ πῆχυν ἓνα; 6.28 καὶ περὶ ἐνδύματος τί μεριμνᾶτε; καταμάθετε τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ πῶς αὐξάνουσιν· οὐ κοπιῶσιν οὐδὲ νήθουσιν· 6.29 λέγω δὲ ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδὲ Σολομῶν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ περιεβάλετο ὡς ἐν τούτων. 6.30 εἰ δὲ τὸν χόρτον τοῦ ἀγροῦ σήμερον ὄντα καὶ αὔριον εἰς κλίβανον βαλλόμενον ὁ θεὸς οὕτως ἀμφιένυσσιν, οὐ πολλῶ μᾶλλον ὑμᾶς, ὀλιγόπιστοι.)

This first pericope naturally divides into three smaller units: vv. 25-26, 27, 28-30. The declaration in v. 27 seems out of place and interrupts the thought flow.²⁹ Vv. 25-26 and 28-30 naturally flow together with the emphasis on food and then on clothing.³⁰ Since the same pattern exists in the parallel in Luke 12:22-32 any assumption of Matthean or Lukan insertion has little credibility. More likely their common Q source contained the saying embedded into this larger text. Each gospel writer merely polished the language to suit his individual purpose.

Don't worry about food, vv. 25-26. Verse 25 introduces the section with the broad scope of life and body. One's life, literally, τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν, is amplified by the follow-up rhetorical questions τί φάγητε [ἢ τί πίητε].³¹ Thus worry about one's physical existence is defined by fretting over what one may find to eat or drink, that is, over food. Secondly, worrying about one's body, μηδὲ τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν, is amplified by the rhetorical question τί ἐνδύσθητε. In other words, concern over finding adequate clothes to wear. The context here points to the bare necessities for survival with food and clothing, the same point made in James 2:15-16:

15 Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, 16 and you say, “Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well” – but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

The essentials, not high fashion in-style dress and gourmet foods, are the point here. Jesus makes the point that our existence is much more than food and clothes. Life has a spiritual aspect that is of far greater importance. Addressing it is key to meeting the physical needs we have.

The comparison is then made to “the birds of the air” (τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). They don't sow or harvest and yet they survive because the Heavenly Father takes care of them. Absolutely dumb is the criticism of some commentators who point to starving birds in objection to Jesus' statement here. A general, basic observation about life is put forth here, not an absolutized all inclusive declaration. One should also note that the birds are not handed their food while setting in their nest. They have to get out and hunt for it. Perhaps, this was behind Luke's use of 'ravens' rather than the more general 'birds' in his

²⁹“6:27 is, on form-critical grounds, to be judged an insertion into Q. As Manson, *Teaching*⁸ observed long ago, Mt 6:26–30 = Lk 12:24–8 exhibits compound parallelism if 6:27 = Lk 12:25 is removed (*Teaching*, p. 56).” (Davies-Allison, *Ibid*.)

³⁰Notice a somewhat similar pattern in Luke 12:22-31 (NRSV):

22 Then turning to his disciples, Jesus said, “So I tell you, don't worry about everyday life – whether you have enough food to eat or clothes to wear. 23 For life consists of far more than food and clothing. 24 Look at the ravens. They don't need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because God feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than any birds! 25 **Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not!** 26 And if worry can't do little things like that, what's the use of worrying over bigger things? 27 Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. 28 And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you? You have so little faith! 29 And don't worry about food – what to eat and drink. Don't worry whether God will provide it for you. 30 These things dominate the thoughts of most people, but your Father already knows your needs. 31 He will give you all you need from day to day if you make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.”

³¹The inclusion of the last part of the phrase in brackets [ἢ τί πίητε] is due to the variation of readings in ancient copies of this part of the Greek text. Some manuscripts include the phrase, but others do not. The editorial committee of the UBS 4th rev. edition of the Greek New Testament included the phrase in brackets to reflect this variation. In the Textual Commentary to the UBS Greek NT the following explanation is provided:

“In favor of the shorter reading, lacking ἢ τί πίητε, is the possibility that the text was assimilated to ver. 31. The variation between καὶ and ἢ can also be taken as an indication of the secondary nature of the addition. On the other hand, the similarity of the ending of φάγητε and πίητε may have occasioned a transcriptional oversight on the part of one or more copyists. To represent the balance of probabilities the Committee retained the words but enclosed them within square brackets.” [Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.)* (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 15.]

recording of Jesus' words here.³² Jesus' point of the higher value of people than birds is based on the value attached in creation as per Genesis one, in particular 1:28.³³

Don't worry about height/time, v. 27. This seeming 'interruption' to the larger pericope also contains unclear designations. The point is that worrying can't add something to something in one's life. But unclear is what that something is. The Greek word πῆχυς ἓνα can mean either 'one single measurement of time' or 'one unit of height.' The related ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ is equally unclear. Are we adding to 'the span of our life' or to 'our height.' More likely the time reference is the point, but not without some question.

Although one could render ἡλικίαν αὐτοῦ 'his stature' (cf. Herodotus 3:16; Ezek 13:18; Lk 19:3; Josephus, *Ant.* 2:230; see Potwi³⁴ⁿ (v)), the first meaning of ἡλικία is 'age', 'time of life' (BAG^{35D}, s.v.), and this is the predominant usage in the LXX and it fits best here: 'Who ... can add one πῆχυς to his span of life?' 'Stature' is incorrect because (1) while the addition of a cubit would be no desirable thing, the context implies something wished for; (2) Luke explicitly labels the addition of a πῆχυς a 'small thing' (12:26) — something he could not do if a man were growing a cubit; (3) Matthew's ἓνα presumably means 'even one', but a cubit with reference to height is hardly insignificant; and (4) the context has to do with food and clothing, which are designed to prolong life, not add height.

The noun, πῆχυς, occurs in the synoptics only in this Q saying. The meaning is 'forearm', then 'cubit' (about 18 inches; cf. ,*ammâ* and Rev 21:17). It was also used metaphorically of time (see BAG^{36D}, s.v.) and is so used in the present context (which justifies the translation of BAG^{37D}, s.v.: 'hour'). For a measurement of space being employed with reference to time see Ps 39:5. The postpositioning of ἓνα is a Semitism (BD^{38F} § 247:2).³⁹

Modern medical research has discovered that worry can't extend our life. Instead, it tends to shorten it. Thus Jesus' point is all the more pertinent.

Don't worry about clothes, vv. 28-30. The third point comes back to the initial reference to body and clothes. The abbreviated focus is on clothes with the rhetorical question: "And why do you worry about clothing?" (καὶ περὶ ἐνδύματος τί μεριμνᾶτε;). In the Lukan parallel of 12:26, a slightly different question is posed: "If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest?" But then both gospel writers narrate Jesus' comparison to the beauty of the lilies:

Matt. 6:28b-30 (NRSV): "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith?"

Luke 12:27-28 (NRSV): "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you — you of little faith!"

³²Luke 12:24 (NRSV): "Look at **the ravens**. They don't need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because God feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than **any birds!**" [κατανοήσατε **τοὺς κόρακας** ὅτι οὐ σπείρουσιν οὐδὲ θερίζουσιν, οἷς οὐκ ἔστιν ταμίον οὐδὲ ἀποθήκη, καὶ ὁ θεὸς τρέφει αὐτούς· πόσω μᾶλλον ὑμεῖς διαφέρετε **τῶν πετελιῶν**.]

³³Gen. 1:20-23 (NRSV): 20 And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." 21 So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and **every winged bird of every kind**. And God saw that it was good. 22 God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." 23 And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

Gen. 1:26-28 (NRSV): 26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." 27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. **28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."**

³⁴ⁿPotwin L. S. Potwin, *Here and there in the Greek New Testament*, Chicago, 1898.

^{35D}BAGD W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, F. Danker, *A Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, Chicago, 1979.

^{36D}BAGD W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, F. Danker, *A Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, Chicago, 1979.

^{37D}BAGD W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, F. Danker, *A Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, Chicago, 1979.

^{38F}BDF F. Blass, A. Debrunner, R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, Chicago, 1961.

³⁹Davies-Allison, ICC, *op. cit.*

The exact identity of the flowers designated by is not certain as Hans Dieter Betz notes.⁴⁰

The expression “the lilies of the field” (τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ) has been and still is the subject of controversy, mainly because of attempts to determine their precise species.⁴¹ But the SM is not interested in classifying flowers. The reference is meant to be general. Although vs. 29^{42*} seems to point to a particular species, what is said about the flowers is true of all of them. Studied closely, every flower reveals its own unsurpassed beauty.

The point of the ‘lilies’ is that they do no manual labor in making clothes to wear. Yet, their beauty is widely acknowledged. God clothes them with this beauty. The degree of that beauty is compared to Solomon, the one individual in Israelite history who surpassed all others in the quantity and quality of clothes that he had made for himself -- a point widely acknowledged in the ancient world, as Betz (*Ibid.*, p. 477) notes, “Indeed, tradition held that Solomon’s royal robes were unsurpassed in splendor.”⁴³ The labor involved in making this clothes for Solomon had to have been mammoth. And yet the beauty of the final product pails in comparison to the beauty of the flowers in the field that God has made.⁴⁴

For a disciple then to worry about clothes reflects serious lack of faith in God.

Don’t worry, vv. 31-33: “31 Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (6.31 μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε λέγοντες τί φάγωμεν; ἢ, τί πίωμεν; ἢ, τί περιβαλώμεθα; 6.32 πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητοῦσιν· οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος ὅτι χρῆζετε τούτων ἀπάντων. 6.33 ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν.).⁴⁵

⁴⁰Hans Dieter Betz and Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Sermon on the Mount : A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49)*, Hermeneia -- a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 476.

⁴¹The lily (Greek: τὸ κρίνον; Hebrew: šūšan, šōšān, šōšannā) plays an important role in the aesthetics of the OT; the beauty of the lily was proverbial and is often compared with human beauty, a fact that also comes to expression in making it a personal name. See John C. Trever, “Lily,” *IDB* 3.133–34; BAGD, s.v. κρίνον; Jehuda Feliks, “Lilie,” *BHH* 2.1093; Olsthoorn, *Jewish Background*, 45–49. J. Enoch Powell has advanced the rather fanciful idea that the lilies make a bad contrast to the birds in the sky and that “animals” should be read instead (“Those Lilies of the Field Again,” *JTS* 33 [1982] 490–92).

^{42*}yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. Matthew 6:29 (NRSV)

⁴³See 1 Kgs 3:13*, where Solomon is promised in a dream: “I give you furthermore those things for which you did not ask, such wealth and glory [LXX: δόξα] as no king of your time can match.” See also 2 Chr 9:15*; Josephus *Ant.* 8.190, which calls Solomon “the most glorious [ἐνδοξότατος] of all kings”; cf. *Ant.* 8.186. The “glory” is reflected by the robes (cf. LXX Esth 5:1*; Sir 6:29–31*; 27:8*; 45:7*; 50:8*, 11*). For Solomon’s proverbial glory see also Str-B 1. 438; Lachs, *Rabbinic Commentary*, 133; Olsthoorn, *Jewish Background*, 45–49; Eduard Lohse, “Σολομών,” *TDNT* 7.461–62, 464–65 (A.2 and B.3). The prominent figure in Greek literature is Croesus, the legendary king of the Lydians; see Diog. L. 1.51: “There is a story that Croesus in magnificent array sat himself down on his throne and asked Solon if he had ever seen anything more beautiful. ‘Yes,’ was the reply, ‘cocks and pheasants and peacocks; for they shine in nature’s colours, which are ten thousand times more beautiful’ (Φασὶ δὲ τινες ὅτι κοσμήσας ἑαυτὸν ὁ Κροῖσος παντοδαπῶς καὶ καθίσας εἰς τὸν θρόνον ἤρετο αὐτὸν εἴ τι θέαμα κάλλιον τεθέαται· ὁ δὲ “ἄλεκτρούνας, εἶπε, καὶ φασιανούς καὶ ταῶς· φυσικῶ γὰρ ἄνθει κεκόσμηται καὶ μυρίῳ καλλίονι”). Cited according to the LCL edition, *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (trans. R. D. Hicks; London: Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1925) 1.52–53.

⁴⁴Betz (*Ibid.*) calls attention to a tradition in the ancient Greek world somewhat related but distinctly different than Matthew’s point:

“The passage under consideration is remarkable also because the subject matter of aesthetics is not often discussed in the New Testament. Although largely remaining at the level of presupposition, beauty in nature is seen, as it was in antiquity for the most part, as a reflection of divine beauty. God himself is beautiful, and the cosmos and its beauty is a mirror image of his beauty. This is the reason why nature’s beauty is unsurpassable and why it is incomparable with the artistry that comes from human hands. That is also why classical Greek art devoted so much attention to creating images of the gods. Making these images reflects the perfect beauty of gods and goddesses, and this was the only way for the artists to overcome the imperfections imposed on their work by the fact that they were human beings. In our passage, therefore, one must judge human artistry, exemplified by Solomon’s royal garments, as coming from human hands. One should praise this art, valued on its own terms, for what it is. In comparison, however, even the most excellent of human artwork must take second place to each and every flower blooming in the fields.”

⁴⁵The Lukan parallel in Lk. 12:29-31 is similar to the wording in Matthew, and yet contains distinctions:

29 And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. 30 For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 Instead, strive for his

This second point first pulls out an implication of the first section by way of ‘therefore’ (οὖν). The implication is the admonition, “don’t worry.” The threefold set of amplificational questions first introduced in verse 25 are now repeated as verbal expressions of worry. This provides the basis for the next comparison: the pagan Gentile world. The ‘striving after physical needs’ by pagans (πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητοῦσιν) is the first reason (γὰρ) to not worry. These people do not know God and in their spiritual hopelessness are left to fending for themselves with their own feeble resources. Consequently materialism is their focus. The second reason (γὰρ) to not worry is the knowledge of God concerning our needs (οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος ὅτι χρῆζετε τούτων ἀπάντων). This theme has already been put on the table in regard to praying in Mt. 6:7-8:

“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

The disciples’ relationship with the Heavenly Father places him/her under divine care and provision. And this alleviates any basis for fretting and fuming over gaining our basic physical needs.

Out of this then comes the admonition to make the Kingdom of God and God’s righteousness our first priority: “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (ζητεῖτε δὲ πρῶτον τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν.). The saying is structured in the traditional Jewish wisdom command / promise pattern, “do this, and God will do that.” What is it that we are to do? Donald Hagner gives a helpful summation:⁴⁶

V 33 concisely states the climactic point of the entire pericope. The kingdom, and the kingdom alone, is to be the sole priority of the disciple and that toward which the disciple devotes his or her energy. ζητεῖτε, “seek,” here does not necessarily mean to look for something not yet present and, given the context of the Gospel, certainly cannot mean one should seek to bring in the kingdom. This imperative means rather that one should make the kingdom the center of one’s existence and thus experience the rule of God fully in one’s heart, hence the present tense, “keep seeking.” To pursue the kingdom in this way is also to seek τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ, “his [viz., God’s] righteousness,” i.e., true righteousness or that which is truly the will of God as it is defined by the teaching of Jesus (so too Olsthoorn, 84). Participation in the kingdom, as Matthew has already informed us (see 5:20), necessitates righteousness of a qualitatively new kind. The gift of the kingdom and the demand of this new righteousness are inseparable. Thus gift, and not merely demand, is implied in this text (thus rightly, Guelich, *Sermon*; Reumann, *Righteousness*; contra Davies-Allison). καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην αὐτοῦ, “and his righteousness,” is thus practically exegetical of the preceding phrase (cf. Rom 14:17). The emphatic πρῶτον, “first” or “above all,” means to make the kingdom and righteousness one’s clear priority in life. The passive voice of προστεθήσεται, “will be added,” is, with v 32 in mind, a divine passive (it is God who will add these things). ταῦτα πάντα, “all these things,” indicates the fullness of God’s provision (cf. v 32 and see especially 7:7-11). See *Comment* on 3:15 for discussion of “righteousness” in Matthew. For numerous parallel references in the rabbinic literature referring to the supreme and prior importance of studying Torah, see Str-B 1:439-40. In the wisdom tradition, cf. Wis 7:11; Ps 37:3-4, 25.

Don’t worry, v. 34: “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.” (6.34 μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε εἰς τὴν αὔριον, ἢ γὰρ αὔριον μεριμνήσει ἐαυτῆς· ἀρκετὸν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἡ κακία αὐτῆς.).

This final admonition to not worry extends the focus from ‘today’ to ‘tomorrow.’ Just as in verse 31, the inferential conjunction οὖν connects the admonition back to the one in verse 25. The internal structure here is admonition with two reasons (γὰρ) that are stated as maxims, i.e., timeless sayings. The wording of the core admonition is identical to the one in verse 31. The difference is the reference to what we are not to worry over: εἰς τὴν αὔριον.

Here Matthew’s account differs from Luke’s use of the Jesus tradition (Lk. 12:32-34):

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven,

kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

12.29 καὶ ὑμεῖς μὴ ζητεῖτε τί φάγητε καὶ τί πίητε καὶ μὴ μετεωρίζεσθε· 12.30 ταῦτα γὰρ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τοῦ κόσμου ἐπιζητοῦσιν, ὑμῶν δὲ ὁ πατήρ οἶδεν ὅτι χρῆζετε τούτων. 12.31 πλὴν ζητεῖτε τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν.

⁴⁶Donald A. Hagner, vol. 33A, *Word Biblical Commentary : Matthew 1-13, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 160.

where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The reason for this departure is unclear, but most likely lies within the different objectives of the two gospel writers. Matthew continues the emphasis upon worry by extending the prohibition from the present to the future. Luke continues the emphasis on the present with an admonition to take action demonstrating that we trust God to take care of us.

The two reasons to not worry about what may happen tomorrow have to do with the nature of tomorrow. First, it will contain its own temptations to worry. If we add those to what we experience today the level of temptation to worry becomes overwhelming. Donald Hagner provides helpful insights here:⁴⁷

In these final words against being anxious, Jesus broadens the exhortation to include anything that might make people fearful of tomorrow. As the present is fully under God's control, so also is the future. Anxious worry is out of place for the disciple, whether with respect to today or tomorrow. The universal application of this saying of Jesus is reflected in the teachings of the early Church in Phil 4:6⁴⁸ and 1 Pet 5:7,⁴⁹ which probably depend upon the logia of the present passage.

ἡ γὰρ αὐριον μεριμνήσει ἑαυτῆς, “tomorrow will be anxious for itself,” is probably to be understood as meaning what the following statement asserts directly. That is, since each day has its own share of trouble and anxiety, let tomorrow (and all future days), so to speak, worry about itself. The disciple should live in the present, not in the future (nor for that matter, the past either).

ἄρκετόν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἡ κακία αὐτῆς, lit. “sufficient to the day is its evil.” By its position, the first word is emphatic. The predicate adjective ἄρκετόν is neuter singular because the subject is an abstract class (BDF §131). The saying has a proverbial ring to it. It is placed here to show the stupidity of being anxious about tomorrow or the future. It provides no warrant for being anxious even about the present day. Each day contains its share of evil, but God's faithfulness can be counted upon on a daily basis. No exact parallels to these logia have been found (but cf. Prov 27:1; and for the similar rabbinic perspective, cf. *b. Sanh.* 100b; *b. Ber.* 9a). For a similar idea in early Christian paraenesis probably dependent on the Jesus tradition reflected in this passage, cf. Jas 4:13–15.

With these powerful words against fretting and fuming over our basic physical needs, Jesus reminds us that when we ask God for our ‘daily bread’ we must raise that request to God out of unquestioning confidence in Him and in His desire and ability to provide what we need. Otherwise the petition stands hallow and hypocritical. And becomes an insult to our Heavenly Father.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

- 1) How do you approach the material needs in your life?
- 2) Do you ask God for “daily bread,” i.e., the basics? Or, for wealth and riches? Which does Jesus validate here?
- 3) How prone to worrying about things are you? Do you see this as lack of faith in God?
- 4) Are you so preoccupied about the future that you want it mapped out in detail in advance? How does such an attitude square with Jesus' words in 6:34?

⁴⁷Donald A. Hagner, vol. 33A, *Word Biblical Commentary : Matthew 1-13, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 160.

⁴⁸Phil. 4:6 (NRSV): “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

⁴⁹1 Peter 5:7 (NRSV): “Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.”