

Can I Really Live in a World of God's Love?

Thomas Robinson, January 5, 2014

Matthew 6:24-34

²⁴ “No one can serve **two lords**, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve **God** and **Mammon** (money).

²⁵ 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?

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 which of you by being **anxious** can add a single hour (cubit) to his span of life?

²⁸ And why are you anxious 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 arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ 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**?

³¹ Therefore do not be **anxious**, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles (nations) seek after all these things, and **your heavenly Father knows that you need them all**.

³³ But **seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness**, and **all these things** will be **added to you**. ³⁴ Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Ephesians 3:16-19

¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be **strengthened** in your inner being with **power** through his **Spirit**,

¹⁷ and that **Christ** may **dwell** in your hearts through **faith**, as you are being **rooted and grounded in love**.

¹⁸ I pray that you may have the **power** with all the saints, to **comprehend** the **breadth** and **length** and **height** and **depth**, ¹⁹ and to **know** the **love of Christ** that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:14-17

¹⁴ For **the love of Christ takes hold of us**, because **we have realized this**: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that **those who live** might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake **died** and was **raised**. ¹⁶ From now on, therefore, **we regard (know)** no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded (knew) Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.

¹⁷ Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation**. The old has passed away; behold, the **new has come**.

Matthew 5:43-48

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall **love** your neighbor and **hate** your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, **Love your enemies** and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be **children of your Father who is in heaven**. For he makes **his sun rise** on the evil and on the good, and **sends rain** on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles (nations) do the same? ⁴⁸ **You therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**”

A New Year — How Do we Live?

We get one life. We want to live it well. But there are so many troubles we face; the world faces. So many ways to get messed up. People often see Christianity focused on evil and suffering; renunciation, guilt, etc. The reality is the opposite. Yes, Christian faith takes suffering seriously, but the problem is that people like Jesus and Paul were deeply happy, joyful people, without our New York cynicism, self-protective and ironical.

In our text, the values of Jesus' sermon come together in a vision of life in the light of God.

Paul's prison prayer in Eph has the same vision in other words. Living in a world of love.

Can I really do that? Isn't it self-delusion? Isn't our world more one of anxiety than of love?

From Fact to Action

Note the "therefore" that starts v 25. Jesus has stated a fact: "*You cannot serve God and Mammon.*" What follows is a choice, a decisive course of action. Mammon and anxiety go together. Mammon/money means my life is in my own power and no more. It's only as secure and valuable as I can make it. I can never have enough! Anxiety is a way of looking at the world: limited, small, constricted. What's important is what I can get.

Jesus says, take action. Refuse anxiety. Refuse Mammon. Choose God. Not because your life is unimportant – escape into a spiritual realm. But because your life (*psyche*) is so important in all its complexity – physical, emotional, spiritual, artistic, moral, relational. God created you whole. In the eyes of God, you are so much more than your anxieties.

Look, Consider – Faith

A problem is our constricted vision. We see Mammon. We block God. We wear the dark sunglasses of our anxieties. What made Jesus so different was that he saw reality; he saw God everywhere. "*Look at the birds!*" "*Consider the lilies.*" Sun-rise. Rain-fall. So also with Paul: "*Power to comprehend ... to know.*" "*We have realized.*" "*We know.*"

When you really look, you see God caring for his world and you on every possible level.

A whole-world faith. Jesus is talking to farmers, toiling women. God feeds the birds and clothes the lilies in glory. All our labor, creativity, productivity, and spirituality are part of God's work in his world, to be done with joy, fulfillment, beauty. Part of a greater whole.

Take your own life as seriously as God takes it. He doesn't think food and clothing are unimportant. He knows you need them. Your work is part of his life. Can you see that?

He also knows that your life reaches high and deep, part of God's life and rule in the whole cosmos. Seek first God's kingdom and justice – your life within God's reality of love.

What comes next? The rest is really unimportant? No. Rather: "All these things will be added to you!" Food, clothing, relationships, knowledge, science, art, love – abundance.

From "Can I Really...?" to "I Do Indeed...!"

The question is not "Can I live in a world of God's love?" Put that way, it becomes a matter of religious anxiety, another Mammon. No, I can't muster the right religious feeling.

Jesus' challenge, Paul's prayer is that we open our eyes to see that that world is already here.

It is the reality of God, where we live, like it or not. Vast and spacious, challenging and beautiful. God's kingdom through all ages, in my life, transforming and life-giving.