

# A revolution in loyalties—Matthew 6:19-34

**Theme:** The biggest threat to Jesus' revolution is our loyalty to rival ways of living—especially those linked to and promoted by cash

All sorts of things and people demand our loyalty—money, spouses, comfort, getting on in life, the boss, our future wellbeing and happiness.

In a series of pithy sayings, Jesus demands our undivided loyalty and promises to set us free from our anxieties so we can live lives of open-handed generosity, safe in the knowledge that as we seek his kingship, he will ensure we have everything we need to sustain our lives.

## Questions:

1. In what ways do we store up treasure on earth? What would happen if we stopped?
2. How can we cultivate the 'single eye' (22-23)? Can we do this on our own or do we need each other? If so, how?
3. In what ways is money like a god?
4. If Jesus sets us free, what does he mean when he says we're either a slave of money or of God?
5. What are the things that make us feel anxious? [be honest as you share—and then pray about them]
6. What do we think Jesus means when he says 'life is more important than food or clothes'?
7. Is Jesus saying that we shouldn't plan for our futures? If not, what should our attitude to the future be?
8. What can we really learn from the birds and lilies?
9. What should we be saying to those around us who 'run after' (32) the things God knows we need?
10. How can we help each other to live lives of trust?
11. How can we teach our children and grandchildren a proper attitude to material things?
12. What do we think the connection is between prayer (as outlined in 6:5-15) and seeking the kingship of God (33)?

## Your stories:

## Potted summary

Jesus fleshes out what he said in 6:11 about our daily bread. He knows that following him might result in us to being anxious about how we'll make ends meet. So, having stressed that he seeks our undivided loyalty, he reassures us that as we seek his kingship, God will provide everything we need. He challenges us to respond to God's generosity by living in single-minded devotion to him, and so becoming like him. More over the page....

# What the passage is about....

## 1) contrasting loyalties (19-24)

Jesus paints three pictures of what our loyalty to God and his revolution look and feel like.

**i) security (19-21):** we are to stop storing treasure on earth—the tense of the verb suggests this is an activity we are currently doing that needs to cease if we are to be loyal members of the revolution. There are two reasons for this: material ones—namely that earthly treasure can be devalued through physical destruction, inflation, stock market crashes or natural disaster (19). They are unreliable and will let us down. And spiritual ones (21)—namely if they are the focus of our lives, they will take our hearts away from God and his revolution.

**ii) single eye (22-23):** Jesus uses a Semitic idiom to describe a believer's focus and the effect that has in their life. No single English word can capture the full meaning of the word translated 'good' (22); the word has two simultaneous points of reference:

- it means 'good' in relation to the believer and God, stressing that we need to be single-minded.
- it means generous in relation to its effect on our lives.

So Jesus is saying: if our whole lives are focused on God and his revolution, they will be full of his light and will result in us living open-handed, generous lives that reflect him to the wider world. If, however, we have divided loyalties, there'll be something of the night about us; we'll live grasping and stingy lives (in 20:15 Jesus uses the same term 'bad eye' in the parable of the workers in the vineyard to describe those who object to what the master does).

**iii) slavery (24):** Slaves had no choice but to do what their master told them. You could not be 'owned' and managed by two people. Jesus is saying that if we try to serve both God and our own interests, we will end up being hopelessly torn as if two rival owners were seeking to run our lives.

Jesus says that money is more than just a handy way of buying goods and services. It is a rival god, seeking to control our lives. If we continue to

store up treasure on earth, then money will determine our morality and lifestyle—and God won't.

## 2) confident living (25-34)

God knows we're anxious about making ends meet, providing for our families; we worry about our children and grand children (six times Jesus tells us not to worry). And following Jesus can make us even more anxious. If we cease being loyal to money, stop storing it so it will look after us when we need it, where will our security come from?

Jesus touched on this in 6:11, now he fleshes out how loyalty to God works. And he reassures us that God delivers.

**i) freedom from anxiety (25):** the things we're anxious about are secondary things – food, clothes, cars, interior design. Life is more than this. What that 'more' is Jesus does not spell out here (NIV adds the word 'important'); he leaves it hanging until v33 where he makes clear what we already really know: that the 'more' is God's Kingdom.

The focus of this whole section is on where our loyalty lies – do we trust God or money? It's not an attack on planning or the good ordering of society or the creation mandate that we work and enjoy the fruits of our labour. It is worry about tomorrow that is the focus of Jesus' concern, that frazzled anxiety that makes us trust mammon rather than God because we can't see where our next meal is coming from.

Jesus says we mustn't let such anxiety throw us off course.

**ii) following good examples of trust (26-30):** be careful how you read these verses. Jesus is not spelling out a theology of creation; still less is he justifying God's action in the natural order against those who say that nature is red in tooth and claw. He is saying his disciples should take a long, lingering look around them; see the birds finding food wherever they go, the plants growing all around them and ponder what in that moment this tells them about God and their lives in relation to him.

Jesus wants us to see this immediate snapshot of life going on all around us as a picture of trust. Here is God making sure the birds and plants have all they need. So won't he similarly provide for us who, Jesus reminds us, are much more important to God than birds and flowers?

**iii) faith in the Father (31-33):** Jesus contrasts those who have joined his revolution with the 'nations' (the Greek word 'ethne' is the same one that Jesus uses in Matthew 28 when he tells us to make disciples among the nations). They trust the market for their security (32). The people of the revolution trust God and hence live open and generous lives.

We can do this because we are seeking (note the present continuous tense; Jesus is describing how we live each and every day) God's rule in our lives (the word translated 'Kingdom' is more dynamic in the Greek and suggests kingship).

More than that, we're seeking 'his righteousness' in contrast to that of the Pharisees (5:20) and generated by our 'acts of righteousness' (6:1), spelled out in 6:1-18. This is a daily choice that I make to live for God not money. And as I do this, so I receive all that I need for today.

It's important that we read this as a community (the verb 'you are seeking' is plural) because, of course, some us have lots and some us have nothing and within the people of God there needs to be equality which happens because single-eyed followers of Jesus are open-handed and generous.

**iv) focus on today (34):** this proverbial saying sums up the whole passage (19-33) and echoes the prayer for daily bread (6:11). It might also be intended to remind us of the provision of manna in the wilderness which happened on a daily basis.

It seems to strike a somewhat downbeat note at the end of the section, reminding us that life will bring trouble to those who are seeking the kingship of God. He will provide for us while others will persecute us. But their opposition will never nullify his grace. So we can trust him today.