

## **B. Seek to Serve God, Not Money** **(6:19–24)**

**SUPPORTING IDEA:** *Jesus' followers must be motivated by their love relationship with God.*

The last half of [Matthew 6](#) deals with wrong perspectives regarding the material realm. In a word, *money*. In [6:19–24](#) Jesus dealt with our greed, while in [6:25–34](#) he dealt with our anxiety over basic necessities. These two problems are actually cousins to each other, because both display a lack of trust in the Father and a lack of eternal perspective.

It is not as obvious in this portion of the sermon that Jesus was confronting the hypocritical religious leaders and contrasting them with the truly righteous kingdom servant. But in the context of the entire Sermon on the Mount (especially the theme of [5:20](#)—exceeding the “righteousness” of the Pharisees), we may assume that such a contrast was intended. This is clear in light of the greed of the religious leaders (see [21:12–17](#)).

There is a connection between this portion of the Sermon on the Mount and its immediate context ([6:1–18](#)). In the preceding section, Jesus contrasted the earthly reward of men’s attention with the heavenly reward from the Father. Now, beginning in [6:19](#), he contrasted the

transience of earthly wealth with the permanence of heavenly wealth. Even the teachings on anxiety ([6:25–34](#)) climaxes with the exhortation to **seek first his kingdom and his righteousness** ([6:33](#)) in the assurance that the fulfillment of our earthly needs will naturally follow. All of [Matthew 6](#) seems to be saying, “Look up!” when our natural tendency is to look at the world around us (see [Col. 3:1–2](#)).

**6:19–21.** Verses [19](#) and [20](#) are almost exact parallels, designed for easy understanding and easy memorization. This is a critical passage. Here the king drew an ultimate contrast between **on earth** and **in heaven**. He urged his followers to forget earth and think of heaven. We must not waste our time trying to get ahead in this world. It is the same idea he expounded in [16:24–27](#). What does it profit a person “if he gains the whole world”? Jesus was demanding that his disciples look up and ahead—“for the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory ... and then he will reward each person according to what he has done” ([Matt. 16:27](#)).

Jesus was summarizing why the kingdom servant is motivated to practice righteous acts. It is not for temporary honor among men on earth, but for eternal reward before the Father in heaven. The point of this life is preparation for

the world to come. The present tense verb here can best be translated, “Stop storing up treasures on earth!” But Jesus does specifically command us to **store up for yourself** in heaven. Moths were universally known as a destructive force (Job 4:19; Isa. 50:9; 51:8). Burglary was especially common in the day of mud-brick homes. **Break** is the Greek term meaning “break through.” It literally means “dig through.” There is no permanence in this world. You cannot take your treasure with you into the next world, but you can send it on ahead through kingdom-oriented stewardship.

Jesus not only saw nothing wrong with his followers working for reward; he went so far as to command it. The New Testament clearly encourages it (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:10–15; 9:24–27). Jesus’ words in the last few verses of the Bible emphasize it: “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done” (Rev. 22:12).

This concept of storing up heavenly treasure by doing good works was common in rabbinic tradition, and so it would have been easily understood by Jesus’ audience and Matthew’s readers. (New Testament passages that expand on this concept, including specific examples of behaviors that have eternal significance, include Matt. 5:12, 30, 46; 6:6, 15;

10:42; 16:24–27; 19:21, 27–29; 25:40; Luke 12:16–21; 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 6:13–19.)

**6:22–23.** The conditional “if” statements of 6:22b–23a are parallel, again using the form of poetic wisdom literature.

These two verses can be confusing until we look at them in the light of the preceding and following context. We have not departed from the theme of the person’s attitude toward material wealth. Jesus spoke of a small part of the body as being very important to the body as a whole, much as James claimed that anyone who could tame his tongue could tame his whole body (Jas. 3:1–12). No muscle of the body can relax if the eye is uncomfortable. Both Jesus and James were speaking of the inner human control over one’s attitude toward wealth and one’s choice of words. These two limited aspects of human choice can have profound consequences for the entire person (the **whole body**, figuratively speaking).

In keeping with the figurative language, the **light** would be an accurate perspective on the value of material wealth, while **darkness** would be some warped distortion of this truth. The person with a generous **eye** can see clearly, and life can be guided in wisdom and safety by such **light**. The person with a covetous, selfish **eye** is walking in **darkness** and is bound for harm he cannot

see.” Poor perspective causes stumbling.

**6:24.** The center of this verse is, again, a symmetrical parallel pair of statements, poetically memorable. The term **Money** is from the Aramaic *mamon*, meaning “wealth” or “property.” It is anything in which a person places confidence. Jesus carefully chose here the picture of a slave. There could be no doubt about the issue of control. No person can serve two masters.

Any compromise of allegiance in this issue reminds us of the Lord’s attitude toward those who are “lukewarm” in [Revelation 3:15–16](#). It seems to suggest he thinks even less of those who claim to serve him, but have other loyalties, than he does of those who claim no loyalty to him at all. The terms **hate** and **despise** should be taken to mean “be less devoted to,” “disregard,” or “love less.” On the other hand, **love** and **be devoted to** would imply a higher priority commitment, not necessarily an exclusive commitment.

### **C. Trust God’s Provision, Not Your Own (6:25–34)**

**SUPPORTING IDEA:** *Jesus’ followers must be motivated by confidence in the Father’s provision for their basic needs.*

In this passage, we find the word *worry*

or *worrying* six times. The word **Therefore** at the beginning of [6:25](#) is important in helping us understand the relationship between a kingdom servant and the king. In [6:19–24](#), the king expounded on his demand for unreserved devotion. Beginning in [6:25](#), he began to say, “Now, when you enter into this kind of total commitment to me, I am going to take care of you. Do not worry.” Our commitment to him and his commitment to us go hand in hand. They are part of the covenant relationship he has established with his people. The person who is totally committed to the king has no need for worry.

This entire passage focuses almost exclusively on God’s provision of (and our anxiety over) food and clothing. However, we must see these two items as simply two concrete examples used to teach a broader principle. We could just as easily insert any other basic need (shelter, a community of belonging, and so on) that can be a source of anxiety, which is also provided by the Father, and the principle applies equally. However, the examples of food and clothing are well chosen (particularly for the first-century world), because they are so foundational to our survival, and they illustrate so well the Father’s provision for us.

**6:25.** Jesus’ point could be translated as “stop worrying.” The rhetorical questions in [6:25b](#) imply, “If God is the provider of

life and body, he will also provide for their sustenance.”

**6:26.** In this verse Jesus came to the first of two illustrations, supporting his main theme in verse 25. Note the use again of the phrase **heavenly Father**, especially in this context of God’s loving care. Jesus was not advocating waiting lazily for God’s provision, but avoiding anxiety as we take responsibility for obtaining it.

**6:27.** This verse moves away from the specific example of food to the broader picture of anxiety in general, showing its utter futility. There is controversy over this verse’s translation, but the NIV translates it as **add a single hour to his life**. Jesus was saying, “If you try to take your basic provision into your own hands, you will find you do not have the power over life and death. Only God has this power, and he will sustain you as long as his plan intends.”

**6:28–30.** Here we are given a more fully developed picture of the second illustration supporting Jesus’ main point in verse 25. Verse 30 is a conditional statement, assuming the truth of the condition. So it could just as easily be translated, “Since that is how God clothes the grass of the field.” The qualifying phrase, **which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire**, emphasizes the transience and worthlessness of the

grass. If God cares so much for something of little value, he will certainly care even more for us who are of much greater value to him. This passage is not only an exhortation to trust the Father, but it is also an affirmation of our great worth in his eyes.

The words **you of little faith** in 6:30 should be translated literally “little faith ones” (and is used elsewhere in the New Testament only in [Matt. 8:26](#); [14:31](#); [16:8](#); [17:20](#); [Luke 12:28](#)). While it can be a confrontational term, it may also be endearing. In this context, Jesus’ tone was not scolding, but coaxing and reasoning. He was asking, “Do you trust your Father or not?”—not with a slap in our face, but with an arm around our shoulder. Jesus was not belittling his disciples; he was encouraging them upward.

**6:31–33.** With these three verses, having illustrated and supported his theme, Jesus built his climax. In verse 32, he made two more points about anxiety. First, it was downright pagan; anxiety was the attitude of those who were not a part of God’s kingdom. Second, it was totally unnecessary to worry about what to eat or drink or wear, because **your heavenly Father knows that you need them**.

If our life is not to be preoccupied with fretting over basic needs, what is our concern to be? The answer is, **his king-**

**dom and his righteousness.** Those two terms are almost synonymous. God's kingdom means his sovereign rule in heaven and on earth, most particularly in and through the life of the individual believer. To seek his kingdom is to seek to ensure that his righteousness is done in heaven, on earth, and, most particularly, in and through our lives.

We are to seek *first* God's kingdom and righteousness. Everything starts here. This is to be our consuming priority. So it is important to remind ourselves of some basic kingdom realities. How does a person find God's righteousness that characterizes his kingdom? Jesus started his sermon by pointing out our utter spiritual bankruptcy. We have no righteousness of our own. Even our best attitudes and actions do not procure it. Righteousness comes as a merciful gift, grace through faith ([Eph. 2:4-10](#)).

The first reference to righteousness that we find in Scripture is [Genesis 15:6](#). Abraham knew how a person received grace, and the apostle Paul confirmed it ([Rom. 4:2-25](#)). The New Testament makes it clear that the righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ ([Rom. 3:22-24](#)). That is the only way we may enter into God's kingdom. Jesus clarified this issue for Nicodemus ([John 3:3](#)). We cannot see the kingdom of God unless we are "born again."

So everything begins with our seeking his kingdom and righteousness. In fact, we are to keep on seeking God's kingdom and righteousness. But we are not to seek in the sense of looking for something hidden. Rather, we are to look for every opportunity to expand more fully his already established rule in our lives and in our world, in anticipation of the day when believers will reign with him ([Matt. 19:27-29](#); [Rom. 8:17](#); [2 Tim. 2:12](#); [Rev. 2:26-27](#); [3:21](#)) when he establishes his kingdom fully on this earth.

Notice how this passage ([6:25-34](#)), which seemed to be taking us in a new direction, actually returns us to the theme of [6:19-24](#)—that we are not to allow anything to distract us from total devotion to God and his kingdom. This is the one priority we must embrace. Money and other concerns can distract us.

Three times in verses [32](#) and [33](#), we find the phrase **all these things**. We might imagine Jesus using it somewhat disparagingly. This was not to belittle the importance of basic necessities, but to place them at the back of the mind of his disciples, far behind his kingdom and righteousness in importance. "All these things" are what pagans (and the Pharisees) scrambled after. "All these things" are thoroughly known by the Father. "All these things" will fall into

place when we put God's kingdom and righteousness in its proper place and serve the kingdom's interests.

**6:34.** Jesus restated for the third time his command, **Do not worry!** This time he broadened it to include any possible anxieties we may have for tomorrow. As an expression of trust in his heavenly Father, the kingdom servant is to live in the present, trusting the Father for the grace to cover the needs of the present. "When tomorrow comes, the Father will provide the grace to cover its needs also," is the implied assurance.

**MAIN IDEA REVIEW:** *Jesus' followers must be motivated by trust in God's provision rather than trust in any earthly source.*