

which are common to all people in all generations. The snare of materialism is that one's longing for it can never be satisfied. In our affluent society, moving up the economic ladder more often than not simply results in larger homes and more possessions, which in turn require greater outlays of money and the need, therefore, to acquire greater wealth. Moreover, once a person has become use to living at a certain economic level, it is increasingly difficult to ever think of returning to something more modest. Indeed, the desire to have wealth is a master that can never be satisfied.

The simple words of our Master at the end of the Sermon apply here: "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (v. 33), that is, all the things necessary for true happiness and fulfillment in being the servant of One Master.

Luke 12:22–31 parallels the Matthew pericope very closely, with some minor changes.

25 For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

Yeshua now goes on to exhort His talmidim to the positive duty of faith and trust in God. Having shown that a true disciple's perspective is not to store up treasures on earth but rather to store up treasures "in heaven" by fulfilling the *mitzvah* of charity (being generous to others, especially those in need) with a view to serving God in life's affairs, the question would naturally be raised as to how one is to provide for one's own needs. "For this reason" (διὰ τοῦτο, literally "On account of this") thus refers back to the immediate context of vv. 19–24, and specifically to the whole enterprise of serving only one Master (v. 24) which summarizes the entire outlook of a true disciple.

I say to you – Throughout the sermon, Yeshua sets forth His teaching as authoritative, both in terms of the content of His words as well as in the *halachah* that derives from them. As the Master, His words are not optional—they are to be the guiding principles for His talmidim.

do not be worried – The Greek word is μεριμνάω (*merimnao*) which means "to be apprehensive, have anxiety, be anxious, be (unduly) concerned" (BDAG, ad loc) and is a key word in our text (used six times). The KJV "take no thought" is misleading in our modern English, for Yeshua requires His disciples, in this very context, "to consider" the issue at hand by noting how God provides even for the birds (v. 26) and how the flowers of the field prove His faithfulness (v. 28). This issue of one's own needs and how they will be met is not, therefore, to be neglected or relegated to something unworthy of thought and planning. Even the petition for daily food in the Prayer indicates that considerations about one's own needs is expected.

Nor does the translation "do not be worried" quite tell the whole story, for it could imply in modern English that one's future needs should not be a concern at all ("Don't worry about it!", like שׁוֹמֵם דְּבָרָא in modern Hebrew), which could give rise to carelessness, apathy, indifference, laziness, and self-indulgence, all of which are unbecoming of a disciple of the Master Yeshua. For our Messiah has already taught that we should guard even the smallest stroke of the Torah (5:17–20), and the Torah commands that we work six days of the week (Ex 20:9, "six days you shall labor and do all your work"). As noted earlier (see comments on vv. 19–21 above), Paul requires that a man provide for his family (1Tim 5:8) because to do so befits one who claims to be a believer in Yeshua. Diligence in providing for the future is a matter of

godly wisdom.

Rather, the word implies the sense of “anxiety,” of mental anguish over the future which no one but God can control. Note the ESV: “do not be anxious about your life,” which gives the proper sense. Anxiety, in this sense, marks both a lack of faith in God’s ability to provide as well as a misplaced sense of one’s own ability to control future events. If we have prayed that He would provide our daily bread, then we must trust that He will do so by giving us the strength and ability to complete the day’s work. But if we have prayed for His provision, then to live in anxiety about tomorrow is to lack faith that He has heard our prayer and will answer in accordance with His wise and merciful will.

Yeshua teaches us not to be anxious about “your life” (τῆ ψυχῆ ὑμῶν), literally “with regard to your soul.” In Hebrew, נֶפֶשׁ, *nefesh*, “soul” can be used to denote a person in general (e.g., Gen 46:15; Lev 24:17). It can also be used as a reflexive pronoun, meaning “oneself” (e.g., Num 30:5–12). Thus, if this is a semitism, we might translate “do not be anxious yourself.” But the parallel to “body” (σῶμα, *soma*) in the next phrase should probably alert us to the use of ψυχή, *pseuxe*, “soul” meaning “life.” We are not to be overcome with anxiety over how we will sustain our lives. In living according to the wise disciplines of God’s instructions, we leave our lives in His hands and trust that He will provide all that is needed to sustain our lives for the days He has allotted to us.

as to what you eat or what you will drink – Some manuscripts leave out “what you will drink” (ἢ τί πίητε, κ, f¹, vg, sy^c, sa^{mss}) but other early manuscripts, including citations by Church fathers, include it (B, W, f¹³, 33, sa^{mss}, Or, Hier^{mss}). But it is possible that its absence is the result of homoioteleuton, since φάγητε (“to eat”) and πίητε (“to drink”) have the same ending. It is also possible that it was added to conform this verse to v. 31 which has both “to eat” and “to drink.” The Lukan parallel lacks “to drink.”¹ It is difficult to decide on the basis of either external (manuscript) evidence or internal matters. The Nestle-Aland Greek text puts it in brackets to indicate the committee was undecided on the matter. But in either case, the basic meaning of the verse is not altered. Eating and drinking often form a kind of *merism* meaning “food in general,” which is how the parallel line at the end of the verse reads: “is not the soul [life] more than food?”

nor for you body, as to what you will put on – The essentials for life, as far as the Apostle Paul is concerned, are food and clothing: “If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content” (1Tim 6:8), a teaching which might be based on this *logion*. Nakedness in the Tanach bespeaks not only shame (as in the case of Adam and Chavah) but also abject poverty. Job describes the poor in this way:

They spend the night naked, without clothing, and have no covering against the cold. (Job 24:7)

They [those who power] cause the poor to go about naked without clothing, and they take away the sheaves from the hungry. (Job 24:10)

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? – The point Yeshua is making in this rhetorical question is that one’s existence (the life [soul], the body) entails far more than food and clothing, as necessary as these are. If God is the very Giver of life (cf. Jn 5:21), then surely He is able

¹The DuTillet and the Münster both include “to drink” but the Shem Tov (Even Bohan) does not. Once again, the Shem Tov is aligned with the Vulgate.

to provide all things necessary to sustain life. If we spend all of our energy in anxiety over how we will obtain the necessities for life, we may miss the purpose of our lives in the process.

In *m.Avot* 2.7 Hillel is reported as saying: “Lots of meat, lots of worms; lots of property, lots of worries....” But if more possessions bring more care, the opposite is also true: less possessions also brings more care. The love of money can equally be the bane of the wealthy and the impoverished, proving that more money or buying power does not overcome the anxiety against which our Master teaches. It is not the getting of more that overcomes such anxiety but the getting of faith in one’s heavenly Father Who promises to provide.

... just as one must serve either God or mammon, so must one either be sustained by anxiety or by faith.¹

¹Allison-Davies, *Matthew*, 1.647.

²The Münster has רָאוּ אֶת-עוֹפוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם. The DuTillet and Shem Tov both have הִסְתַּכְּלוּ בְּעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם. Lachs (p. 132) notes that κατά

26 Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?

Yeshua now gives a fitting example of God’s faithfulness in providing our needs. He asks us to consider birds. Luke’s account has “ravens,” but for Matthew’s Jewish audience, the unclean raven (Lev 11:15) may have been avoided (though note Ps 147:9). He also uses the Greek equivalent of הִבִּיטוּ לְאֵל, “to look to something” (cf. Is 51:1, 2, 6), ἐμβλέψατε εἰς rather than Luke’s κατανοήσατε (“give attention to”).² This analogy finds parallel in the rabbinic literature:

R. Simeon b. Eleazar says, “Have you ever seen a wild beast or a bird who has a trade? Yet they get along without difficulty. And were they not created only to serve me? And I was created to serve my Master. So is it not logical that I should get along without difficulty? But I have done evil and ruined my living.” (*m.Qiddushin* 4.14, cp. *Exodus Mechilta* on 16:14)

Thus, Yeshua’s illustration is well within the rabbinic teachings and argues from the lesser to the greater. If God provides for the birds of air which were not created in God’s image and thus not given the privilege of ruling over the earth (Gen 1:28), how much more is He willing and able to provide for those who bear His image (cf. Matt 10:31).

27 And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?

Here we find the second time μεριμνάω (*merimnao*, “to be anxious”) is used, reminding us of the main theme of this pericope.

The primary interpretive issue is how we are to understand the words ἡλικία (*helikia*, “life time, life span, height”) and πῆχυς (*pexus*, “arm, cubit”). Is Yeshua talking about adding inches to one’s height (so KJV, NKJV, “can add one cubit unto his stature”) or time to one’s life span (so NASB, NIV, ESV, CJB)? The word *helikia* usually means “age” (so in Classical Greek) but by analogy also “height” in that as one becomes older, one also grows in height. The word *pexus* means “cubit,” which was the span of the arm, usually 18 inches but it could also be as long as 25 inches. Those who opt for the

sense of adding one's height press the literally meaning of this word. But it could just as well be used here metaphorically (cf. Ps 39:5 "You have made my life a few handbreadths"), and it seems most likely that this is the case. For the point of the saying is that one cannot add even a very small measure (cf. Lk 12:26, "If you cannot do the least of these things..."), and the idea of adding 18 inches to one's height hardly seems a small matter!

Thus, the point is that we cannot guarantee tomorrow—our lives are in the hands of the Almighty. Those who live with anxiety over the future hope to lengthen their lives but in reality only spoil the time allotted to them. Therefore, such anxiety is foolish and accomplishes nothing. Ironically, modern medical science has proven that stress, worry, and anxiety actually shorten one's life by disabling the immune system and overtaxing vital organs. Stress and anxiety also adversely affect eating and sleeping which contribute to poor health.

28–30 And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!

Yeshua now adds an illustration to bolster His previous words about clothing. In the same way that the birds of the air are fed by God's hand, so the flowers of the field are adorned in beauty by the Creator's care. We find in both of these analogies a sacred motivation for the study of nature.

Once again the key word is "worry" or "to be anxious" (*merimnao*). In the same way that one should not fret about tomorrow's food, so one should not be anxious over how one's other basic life's needs will be met. As Allison-Davies point out, Yeshua turns a common motif of the Tanach in a surprising way. Throughout the Tanach, the grass and flower of the field are symbols of the transitory nature of life:

...All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. (Is 40:6–7, cf. Job 8:12; 14:2; Ps 37:2; 90:5–6; 102:11; 103:15–16; Is 37:27, cp. James 1:9–11)

Yet in Yeshua's analogy, the flower of the field is put forth as a symbol of enduring beauty maintained by the hand of God. Moreover, the beauty of the flower (regardless of whether the word means "lily" or some other kind) exceeds that of Solomon's raiments, which must have been lavish owing to his legendary wealth. In rabbinic literature, Solomon's lavish meals are used as a measure of true wealth (m.*Bava Metzia* 7.1; t.*Ta'anit* 4.13; b.*Eruvin* 40b–41a). If therefore the flower of the field, having done nothing of itself to obtain such beautiful adornments, exceeds the glorious fineries available to the world's richest man, and such attainments are necessarily from God, certainly He is able and willing to cloth His own children. Even more, the flower of the field enjoys a very short existence, being cut down in the harvest or wilting at the change of seasons. If God takes care to adorn such transitory figures, surely He will care for His chosen ones. Once again, the argument is from the lesser to the greater (*kal v'chomer*).

You of little faith! – This phrase is actually one word in the Greek, ὀλιγόπιστος, *oligopistos* (*oligos*, “little, small” + *pistos*, “faith”). The word is a favorite of Matthew (Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8) and is found elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures only in Luke’s parallel to our text (Lk 12:28). Outside of the Apostolic Scriptures, the word is found primarily in references to the Gospels (see *BDAG* ad loc). In the rabbinic literature we meet the phrase קטני אִמְנָה, “little ones of faith,” as in b.*Berachot* 24b: “One who says the Tefillah so that it can be heard is of the small of faith,” The meaning is that one who feels he must pray loudly in order for God to hear lacks proper faith. An even closer parallel to our Master’s teaching is found in b.*Sota* 48b:

R. Eliezer the Great declares: whoever has a piece of bread in his basket and says, “What shall I eat tomorrow?” belongs only to them who are little in faith” (מִקְטָנֵי אִמְנָה)

Interestingly, every time *oligopistos* “one of little faith” is used in Matthew, it is addressed to the disciples, so it does not mean “one who lacks faith” but one who, though he believes, is not willing to exercise faith to the extent that he should.

It is true that the initial faith that a person possesses to trust in God and His Messiah Yeshua for eternal salvation is a gift from God and not something produced by the person himself. Paul is clear about this in Eph 2:8–9,

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

The demonstrative “that” most likely refers to the entire first clause, meaning that the salvation and the faith by which it is obtained are both a gift from God and not something manufactured by the one who believes. Thus, Paul specifically states in Rom 4:5 that believing is not a work.

Yet once the initial gift of faith is given, it remains the duty of the believer to grow in his faith or to enlarge his faith. So it is said of Abraham that he did not “become weak” in faith, but rather “grew strong in faith” (Rom 4:19–20). The believer, born from above through the gift of his initial faith, is given the ability and opportunity to enlarge his faith by trusting God in all of life’s vicissitudes. It is the consistent attendance to the means of grace given to us by God that cause our faith to grow. These means of grace include: knowing Him through the Scriptures, prayer, assembling together for mutual encouragement and edification, and the doing of the *mitzvot*.

31–32 Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

¹In v. 25 uses ἐνδύω for “wearing clothes” while v. 31 has περιβάλλω, “to put on clothes,” but the meaning is the same.

The Master here summarizes His previous teaching by repeating the main verbs or ideas: eat, drink, wear.¹ The disciples of Yeshua are not to have anxiety over these matters and as such, are to be seen as distinct from the Gentiles (here meaning “unbelievers, pagans,” cf. 6:7) who are entirely taken up with the pursuit of (“eagerly seek”) these mundane matters. While the unbelievers focus their entire lives upon that which will pass away, the