

Homeless, Jobless, and Struggling

Many people find themselves in serious situations, such as being homeless or out of work. Often this is due to choices that they've made, but other times it's due to hard circumstances that have befallen them. If you should find yourself in a situation like this, no matter how you came to be in this condition, there is hope! This essay aims to highlight the teachings of Jesus who promises that He will meet our needs, so long as we are doing our part. Understanding, and following through with what God expects from us, is the key to living a worry-free life where one can enjoy the basic necessities; food, clothing, shelter.

When I was a pastor in California, I would regularly take groups of people to Mexico on mission trips. We'd spend a week in places like Tijuana or Mexicali. Crossing the border from California into Mexico, one would quickly see the contrast between living conditions. Most of the places where we'd stay and minister were very uncivilized; squatters living in dumping grounds, and homes built into the hillsides, all using stolen electricity. In Tijuana, many neighborhoods were rough, with very little greenery. You could be on a hilltop and look for miles around you, and hardly see any trees; just row after row of shanty houses and dirt roads.

On one particular trip, after we'd been in Tijuana for about four days, I noticed member of my group commenting on all of the stray dogs that they'd seen. All over Tijuana, you'd see feral dogs roaming the streets. These dogs were sickly looking; skinny to the bone, most with mange and open wounds. Sometimes you'd see dead dogs in the gutter. It was a disturbing topic of conversation. At our daily morning chapel session, I brought up the issue, and drew our attention to Matthew 6:26, ***"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?"*** I asked the group, *"Who is responsible for caring for the dogs here in Tijuana?"* They all rightly responded, *"The people."* I agreed. Dogs are a domesticated animal here in Tijuana. It's man's job to care for the dogs. I then asked, *"How are the people doing in caring for the dogs?"* The group obviously agreed that the people were doing a poor job. I then asked, *"Who has seen a sickly bird here in Tijuana? Has anyone seen a gimp bird with missing feathers, or laying dead in a gutter?"* Nobody had seen a sickly bird. I continued by pointing out that as they looked over the valley, there were hardly any trees to be seen. Yet, the birds were flourishing. As I challenged the camp to listen carefully, we could hear birds calling, and could see them flying around. The comparison was obvious. God's in charge of the birds, and they're doing great! Man's in charge of the dogs, and the city is ripe with sickly dying dogs. Man is a poor steward. God is a perfect steward; you can trust Him.

Let's explore the rest of the passage that I shared with the group. Here's Matthew 6:25-34, ***"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? 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? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 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! 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. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."*** Let's unpack this passage.

“Do not be worried about your life.” Worry is a sin, period. Don’t do it. To worry is to accuse God of being unfaithful. God is sovereign, which means that He is governing over the whole universe. He is able to step in and control anything He wants to at any time. God allows us to make poor choices, by virtue of our free will, but He is ultimately in control. Don’t worry about, ***“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?”*** Here, Jesus is referring to the basic necessities of life; food, drink, clothes. God knows that you need these things! By Jesus posing the question, ***“Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”*** He’s saying that your life has far greater value beyond the food and clothes that care for your body. Since He is the author of your existence, the giver of your life and body, will He not also furnish for you the far less important things needed to sustain the greater thing? Of course, He will!

Jesus then compares our value to that of the lowly birds of the air. Even the birds, which are under His perfect care, have all that they need! ***“They do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns,”*** which shows the degree of providence that God has over these simple creatures. ***“Are you not worth much more than they?”*** Surely, you and I are far more valuable than birds. Birds have no soul, they have no mind, emotion, or will. Jesus didn’t make birds in His image. Jesus didn’t become a bird, or die in the place of birds, nor offer eternal life to any birds. Yet, despite their lowly place in this world, He sees that their needs are met! How much more can we trust Him to meet our needs!

“And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?” What a waste of time it is, to worry. What has this blatant sin ever done to help a single individual? Spoiler alert – it hasn’t! Jesus goes on to talk about clothes; another thing that He sees His people troubling themselves over. He compares our clothing to the flowers of the fields; lilies in particular. Lilies do nothing under their own power, ***“they do not toil nor do they spin.”*** That’s a fancy way of saying that lilies don’t grow weary from hard work. God uses lilies to “clothe” the grass fields. Yet, ***“not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.”*** Don’t be tempted to think that flowers have worth even greater than Solomon. Nope! If lilies are how God, ***“clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you?”*** God’s going to destroy this earth and all that is in it, in order to make way for a new earth (Revelation 21). So, even though God takes care to adorn the grassy fields with beautiful clothes/lilies, how much more importantly will God care for you and I, given that we have eternal value?

Our worrying over the necessities of life shows a great lack of faith on our part. ***“You of little faith! 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.”*** Pagans (i.e. Gentiles) stress over these simple necessities, and even pursue them as if there’s no such thing as a great Provider! Pagans don’t know the Lord and don’t abide in His care. Christians ought to live differently; not worrying like a faithless pagan might. Stop worrying! God will meet all of the basic needs that a Christian has, so long as the believer keeps to his part of the deal. So, what’s the deal? Jesus spells it out for us. ***“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”*** As long as a believer seeks the Lord first, puts Christ first in his life, and strives to live righteously, God promises that ***“all these things”*** will be given to you. ***“These things”*** are the basic necessities of life; food, clothes, shelter.

Can a Christian find himself living on the streets, or jobless? Yes, he can. This sort of thing can happen when a believer engages in reckless choices. If that’s you, don’t worry. There’s hope. Repent of your sin, and turn back in faith. Trust in the Lord above all else. Seek Him first, and God promises to meet your daily needs.

That's His Word, you can take it to the bank! He's faithful to deliver on what He says. The variable is you. Are you going to faithfully seek Him first? I've never heard of a Christian that's sought the Lord and aimed to live righteously, who has not had his needs met. That just doesn't happen. Even those that have dire circumstances, God is always faithful on His end, supplying needs that sometimes seem to come out of the blue!

Recently I was driving home from the jail and I exited the freeway and came to the stop light at the end of the off-ramp. This is usually an intersection where I see people panhandling with a cardboard sign. These are able bodied men who are choosing to devote their day to begging. When I see this behavior, I'm reminded that society should be slow to provide for men what they can provide for themselves. Able bodied or disabled, it doesn't matter; people with disabilities can find jobs too as people with disabilities are everywhere in the work force. Anyway, as I pulled up the light, I recognized the man begging, and he recognized me. He was a former inmate and called out to me smiling, "*Chaplain!*" I said, "*Hop in, let's go grab something to eat and talk.*" He did. He told me that he lived in a tent in the woods. As we sat at a restaurant I asked him why he was still homeless. I told him that homelessness and Christianity are incompatible, and that he must have a divided heart to be in this condition.

He explained his circumstances, "*Every day I wake up and the first thing I see is the dirty tent above me. I see my dirty hands and my dirty sleeping bag, etc. That's how I view myself, dirty. I start my day that way and that's just how I see myself all day long. It keeps me low.*" I thanked him for being honest with me and I understood what he meant. It's like when a person is trying to quit doing something, like smoking, drinking, or looking at porn. Once you mess up, you just figure, "*Well, there's no point in fighting it anymore. I've already blown it. I might as well keep going.*" We get defeated so easily. I explained to him that as long as he sees himself as dirty, then he will remain in that mindset. If you think you're stuck in sin, you are. If you think you can't have victory over sin, you won't. That's the division in his heart that is keeping him from living in the fullness of his faith. Division literally means two visions. You can't have an identity as a Christian and an identity as a filthy rag. Hence his homelessness. He has to see himself as God sees him. I explained that his value and worth come from the Lord, and not his circumstances. He agreed. He owned up to his divided heart and knew that his false identity and his compromises were the reasons he was living on the streets.

If you're in a real struggle, don't depend on the government, or men. Instead depend on God. God may choose to use men or the government to be a temporary resource, but, these things aren't a substitute for the Lord. Jesus Christ is the author of your life, so seek Him first and watch and see how He will meet your daily needs. ***"So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."*** That's Jesus' way of saying, "*As long as you're seeking Me first, and stewarding what I give you, I'll be in charge of taking care of you. Let that burden fall on Me! Do you trust Me? Watch and see the amazing ways that I'll meet your needs.*"

If you find yourself in a serious jam, that's one of God's ways of drawing your heart to Him. He allows you to get to places in your life where you can't go any further on your own. Will you trust Him? He's a good and loving God. He'll provide!