

A Different Kind of Lifestyle

Matthew 6:25-34

We are on week 7 of our series on the Sermon on the Mount. My plan is to continue through Matthew 7, which will take us through the end of April. As we've been working through this study, Jesus has been making it clear that following him isn't just about believing in him and going to church on Sundays; it's something that impacts and influences every part of our lives. We shouldn't blend in and be like everyone else. We should be salt and light. We have a different calling and purpose, different motivations, priorities, and goals to aim for. Following Jesus means becoming like him and includes not just our beliefs and character, but also how we spend our time, money, and effort. It influences our whole lifestyle.

We saw that in the last sermon where Jesus made it clear that you cannot live for the treasures of earth and the treasures of heaven at the same time because your heart doesn't work that way. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," so you have to choose what you're going to pursue in this life and who you're going to serve. Are you going to serve God, or the things of this earth? If you choose God, that doesn't mean you can't enjoy the earthly blessings he's given, but it does mean you're going to have to make some clear decisions about what you aim for and how you spend your time, money, and effort.

So following Jesus requires a lifestyle that's different than the rest of the world. And the teaching we're going to look at today is going to help us see that even more. What is your lifestyle like? How do you spend your time, money, and effort? What does your schedule look like? What are you paying most attention to from day to day?

Here in western Wisconsin, I would say the majority of people live a busy, middle-class lifestyle. We typically have decent paying jobs and homes to live in. A lot of us are married and have kids or grandkids. We have at least one vehicle. We spend our time and money on a lot of different things – going to work, school, kids activities, church, hobbies, projects, clubs, and so on. I think I would describe our lifestyles as busy; our schedules are full; we're on

the go most of the time; we're tired, stressed out; we spend our money on a whole bunch of different things. This is basically the culture we live in.

But after looking at what Jesus said in my last sermon – about serving God rather than money and pursuing treasures in heaven rather than treasures earth – I wonder what he would say about our lifestyles? Are Christians supposed to live this way? Or should we be different than the cultural norm? Do we need to change some things in order to live like Christ calls us to live? I want us to see what Jesus says in our passage today. The people he was talking to were in a very different economic situation than ours and that affected their lifestyles, but I see a clear parallel between their lifestyles and ours that Jesus tells them needs to change.

So before we dig in to what Jesus said, I want to talk a little bit about the economic situation of the people in Galilee and how it affected their lifestyle. This is important for understanding what Jesus says to them. Their situation was a lot different than ours. We need to understand that there was widespread poverty in that society. People did not live like we do. According to research from the Department of New Testament Studies at the University of Pretoria, South Africa the economic breakdown of people in Galilee at that time was as follows:

- 3% were extremely wealthy
- 7% had moderate surplus resources, which is similar to most of us
- 62% were at a subsistence level, barely able to make ends meet, we would consider them to be poor by today's standards
- 28% were below subsistence level, living in poverty (widows, orphans, beggars, prisoners)

So the research found that 90% of people were what we would consider to be poor. They barely had enough to survive. Most were small farmers with inadequate or barren land, or serfs on large estates. They were under heavy taxation and debts and many had to submit themselves to indentured servitude because of their debts. So after paying rents, taxes, loan payments and interests, there simply was nothing left.

That's who Jesus was talking to. And that meant their lifestyles were different than most of ours – primarily focused on trying to survive. They were often

worried about whether or not they were going to make it. They worked day in and day out just to provide food, drink, and clothing for themselves and their families.

Jesus had just told them, as we saw a couple weeks ago: “Don’t focus your life on laying up for yourselves treasures on earth, focus on laying up treasures in heaven. For where your treasure is, your heart will be also. You cannot serve God and money/mammon.” What did that mean for people in poverty? What would that kind of life look like? How could they focus on the kingdom of heaven when they were so busy just trying to survive? Here’s what Jesus told them next...

Read Matthew 6:25-34.

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 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 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.

One of the things I noticed is that Jesus seems very confident in saying these things and calling the people to not worry, but trust in the provision of their heavenly Father so they could live a different kind of lifestyle than everyone else. Rather than worrying so much and living lives consumed with providing food, drink, and clothing for themselves and their families, they were to trust in God’s provision so they could focus on seeking his kingdom and his

righteousness and make that their first priority. He's not telling them to quit working or farming or whatever, but he is telling them to stop being anxious, which means being consumed and distracted by those things.

Now, if you're someone living in poverty, that seems like a pretty risky lifestyle change. There's a lot at stake. We're talking about putting food on the table and a cloak on your back. Shouldn't that be your highest concern? But Jesus is saying, "Don't worry so much about that. Don't let that dominate your life. Focus on spreading God's righteousness and doing the work of the kingdom."

And he gives a bunch of reasons for why they should live that way:

- The first is in verse 25: "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" In other words, your life is way more important just living to survive. So don't live that way.
- The second is given as two examples of living creatures that are way less important to God than those people were, and yet God didn't leave them high and dry. He provides food for birds and clothing for lilies and he will certainly provide for the needs of his people.
- The third reason is a logical question in verse 27 about what all their worrying about food would accomplish for them: Will it add even one hour to your life? The obvious answer is "no." So don't live that way.
- The fourth reason is in verse 32, and he's basically saying, if you're consumed with living for what you eat, drink, and wear, you're no different than the pagans and unbelievers. So don't live that way.
- The fifth reason is in that same verse where he says, your heavenly Father is fully aware of exactly what you need.
- And finally, in verse 33 he tells them to go ahead and change their lifestyle because God will make sure they have everything they need. And you can see how he fulfilled that as you read the book of Acts – people helped each other and they shared with those in need.

The way they were living their lives, consumed with trying to put food on the table, was not good and would need to change if they were going to fulfill God's calling and purpose for their lives. Some of you need to hear that this morning because you've thought it was virtuous to put your nose to the grindstone and work yourself to the bone so you can provide for your family, and Jesus is saying, "Don't live that way." You can't live a life consumed and

distracted by work because then you won't give any time and effort to seeking God's kingdom and righteousness. Trust that God will provide so that you can live for him and his righteousness and his kingdom and make that your priority. It's good to work – work is a gift from God. But that gift becomes a problem and detriment to Christ's call on your life if you become a workaholic. So don't live that way.

Now, most of us are in a much different economic situation than the people Jesus was speaking to, so I think his message for us would be a little different, but I think he would basically make the same point. I think he would say, you can't get caught up in pursuing all the things everybody else is pursuing and living a super-busy life with a full schedule all the time, lots of stress, running back and forth to this and that to try to fit everything in, because if you do you won't have anything left for what matters most. You won't spend any time and effort seeking God's kingdom and righteousness. You won't be involved in things that grow your faith and spread the truth of the gospel. You won't have time for worship, fellowship, Bible study, prayer, serving, or ministry.

So don't live that way. Don't live like everyone else. That's what nominal Christians, unbelievers and atheists do. They chase after all those things and you need to be different or you're not going to live out God's calling and purpose in your life – to be salt and light to the world around you. You need to live a different lifestyle by lowering the importance of all those other things and seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Joining him in the work of spreading his kingdom on earth needs to be our top priority and we need to quit being consumed by all these other things.

Now, that's easy for me to say, but really hard to do. The culture we live in does not leave room for us to make Christ our highest priority, much less spend any time focusing on his kingdom and righteousness. The normal lifestyle in our world squeezes him out completely. So we feel pretty good if we're just able to make it to church on Sunday. But the struggle we're facing isn't nearly as difficult as what the people in 1st century Israel were facing. They were actually fighting to survive, where we're just fighting to not miss out on opportunities for us or our kids. It's a lot less risky for us to make a change in our lifestyle. We're probably not going to have to wonder if we're going to

starve to death. We just have to miss out on some things and say “no” to some interests and good opportunities. Are we willing?

And how do we know when our lifestyle is in the right place? I think we’ll know if we look at how we’re spending our time, money, and energy and ask: Am I seeking first Christ’s kingdom and righteousness in my life? If you can say “yes” to that question, you’re probably in a good place. And if you say “no” you probably need to cut back more.

Now, I want to acknowledge that there are seasons of life that are just really busy and there really isn’t a lot you can do. Maybe you’re building a home or cleaning up after a disaster. Maybe you or a loved one has an ongoing health issue that demands a lot of your time. Maybe you’re raising kids and life is just busy and there’s no way around that. The reality is for that season there might not be much you can do. But don’t be content with just staying overwhelmed by busyness. Make it your goal to do whatever you can to prioritize Christ during that season. Set aside time daily to connect with God. Take some breaks where you can refocus on the Lord. Go to church or small group regularly. And when that season comes to an end, don’t be content with just coasting in your relationship with God. Re-engage and re-commit to the kind of lifestyle that seeks first his kingdom and his righteousness.