



Seeking his kingdom and his righteousness

An address for the Cosmic Mass ● 20th May 2007 ● Rev Lukas

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life (psuche), what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body (soma), what you shall put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 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 more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin: yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 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 men of little faith?

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat? Or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day.

Matthew 6:25-34

The reading from Matthew is good to hear from time to time particularly when we are feeling ourselves being pulled here and there by the forces of this world, or experiencing anxiety about our lives and the future.

Over the past weeks, since Easter, during what we call the mystical interval, I have needed to remind myself of my goals and purposes, the ideal of my life. It is probably a good thing to do every day, regardless, but it has seemed particularly necessary over recent weeks. I am wondering if others have had this experience also.

This year I have been drawn to the early chapters of the Gospel of Matthew. Perhaps something to do with going back to basics. Earlier in the year we heard an address on Matthew Chapter 4, concerning Jesus going into the wilderness after his baptism. There he grappled with the forces of the world. He then calls the first disciples Simon, Andrew, James and John. After this he begins his ministry by teaching the Beatitudes, which is portrayed in chapter 5. Then in chapters 6 and 7 we read a series of guidelines and instructions given by Jesus on living a spiritual life. It is chapter 6 that I want to focus on today.

I will give some examples from the first part of chapter 6. You will be familiar with these:

- 'You are the light of the world...men do not light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven.

- “Do not swear by heaven for it is the throne of God, or by earth for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem for it is the city of the Great King. Let what you say be simply yes or no, anything more than this comes from evil.’
- Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

The Lord’s Prayer A little further into chapter 6 we read Christ’s instructions on how to pray. ‘And when you pray you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men... But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you... do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this...’ – and at this point we read the words of the Lord’s prayer.

The Lord’s prayer is not about asking for things for oneself or for anyone else actually. Christ says that your Father already knows what you need so there is no need to pray for those things. ‘Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.’ The Lord’s prayer concerns the transformation of oneself, it concerns living one’s life in accordance with divine will.

*Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

These words express a willingness to bring the kingdom of heaven into one’s being and then to live one’s life here on earth in this body in line with divine will. This entails the transformation of one’s way of life. In praying this prayer we are opening ourselves to this work of transformation.

The remainder of chapter 6 contains many sayings that expand on the meaning of the Lord’s prayer.

Give us this day our daily bread. In relation to this verse, we read: ‘Do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourself treasures in heaven.’ Trust that what one needs is available. As we heard in the first reading, ‘Look at the birds of the air... your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they?’

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Regarding this we read: ‘For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.’

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. There are a number of sayings in chapter 6 that can be used to understand this statement. However I will focus on the following: ‘No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon.’

God and Mammon

I want to explore this verse further, because on first reading this statement one tends to question its logic. What’s wrong with being devoted to one and despising the other? Or another question that comes to mind is: ‘Well then, how do I live a spiritual life when I need to make a living? Are these two things mutually exclusive?’

The act of despising or hating means that we are still controlled by that one, we are still serving that one. As an illustration, take a relationship that ends bitterly, with hatred. Then the person goes into another relationship and says, 'I love you' (that is the new one), but they still hate the other previous one. Their energy is divided between both. It is irrelevant which one they hate or love because they are not free; they are attached to both. They are serving both.

Another example: a person may decide to deny aspects of material or physical life to become more 'spiritual'. For example they may deny money, power or sex. This can result in that person fighting their own impulses, and denouncing the expression of those impulses. Their energy is taken up in this internal battle, till eventually something gives, perhaps a painful 'fall from grace'. The point being that with such internal conflict they are not free from what ever they are trying to deny. They are still serving it. Christ says you can't do this, it is not going to work. 'You cannot serve God and mammon.'

Release from a Duality

At this point in the gospel of Matthew Jesus explains what he means by the saying, 'You cannot serve God and mammon.' He continues, 'Therefore I tell you, (or another translation – Through this I am saying to you) do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body what you shall put on.' This explanation continues as we heard in the first Scripture reading.

The word translated as 'life' is the Greek word 'psuche' or psyche, which is often translated as 'soul'. Do not be anxious about your soul. And the word translated as body here is the Greek word 'soma'. Which we can interpret to mean our body nature, which includes our physical, etheric and to a lesser extent the astral if you like, those bodies that are incarnated into this world.

Do not be anxious about your body nature, and what you shall put on.... 'And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' This is a particularly rich illustration of trusting in nature or those aspects of our nature that are provided by God.

Do not be anxious about your soul, what you shall eat or what you shall drink. '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?' I particularly like this illustration where the life of soul is likened to a bird of the air. It conjures a wonderful picture of the soul freely expressing itself, like a bird in flight, not tethered to the body nature, not enclosed in a cage of anxiety.

Then we read the words, 'Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.' There are two objects in this sentence- his kingdom AND his righteousness. Don't forget that all this comes shortly after the Lord's prayer. 'Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.' When we pray this verse we acknowledge the world of spirit. 'Thy kingdom come.' Here we invite this spirit into our lives, into our soul. We are seeking his kingdom and are willing to align the life of our soul (psuche) with spirit.

The word 'righteousness' can be interpreted in various ways, but in this context it can mean the conduct of one's life, deeds and work, imbued with spirit and aligned with truth.

'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' This expresses a willingness then to live one's life in accordance to the divine will. In praying these words we are seeking his righteousness, which is a willingness to align our body nature (soma) with spirit.

This then is a perspective on the words in the gospel of Matthew 'Seek his kingdom AND his righteousness.' A picture emerges of an amalgamation of spirit and body, reconciliation, and a release from the duality of God and Mammon. This would be a state of being where one is without inner conflict - a state of freedom where one does not need to justify one's beliefs by condemning the beliefs of another. Jesus warned against this trap, 'You will be devoted to one and despise the other'.

St Paul on Worship

The Gospel of Matthew is always good to refer to for practical guidance and advice. St Paul's letters are also good for this purpose.

In Romans 12:1 we read the well-known verse, 'I appeal to you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies (soma) as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.'

Here Paul gives a definition of the term 'worship'. It is a willingness to align one's life in the body with spirit and truth. 'Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.' This willing work is a sacrifice, and Paul equates it with 'spiritual worship'. So potentially, one's whole life and experience in this earthly body can become an act of worship.

Aligning Body, Soul and Spirit

In Paul's second letter to Timothy, we read Paul's guidance to Timothy. Paul talks of those who dispute about words, that is, they argue about spiritual teachings. He says, 'Avoid such ungodly chatter for it will lead people to more ungodliness and their talk will eat its way like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus.'

This small section of Paul's letter to Timothy can be read literally and have application today. However when it is also heard with a 'metaphysical ear' it can assist us to become clearer about the work of aligning one's life with spiritual truth.

We have the four names Paul, Timothy, Hymenaeus and Philetus.

Paul experienced the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. So we can interpret 'Paul' to represent the wise enlightened spiritual teacher within us. The name Paul actually means little or to make small, so metaphorically the name can represent that still small voice of truth within us. The name 'Timothy' means 'worshipping God'. So he can represent that aspect of oneself that seeks to align one's life with spiritual truth – that which seeks his kingdom and his righteousness, that which worships, as defined by Paul.

Paul coaches Timothy with the words, 'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.' Timothy is learning from his teacher about spirit and truth and how not to be put off by influences such as Hymenaeus and Philetus.

The name Hymenaeus can be interpreted to mean marriage to the world, marriage to the desires and passions of the world and so can represent our body nature. This name comes from the name of a Greek god who, among other things, was invoked at weddings to arouse the passions of the bride and groom to ensure a lasting union occurred. As a negative influence then, Hymenaeus is interpreted to mean an over-focus on our earthly self, our body nature. It relates to desires and anxieties and represents that aspect of self which has not considered the 'lilies of the field' - that aspect of oneself that is conformed to the world and distracted from spiritual truth.

The name Philetus comes from the Greek word 'phileo'. This is a word that can be translated to mean love, but tends to be used more to mean a personal affection, rather than an unselfish love which is 'agape'. As a negative influence then, Philetus relates to an aspect of our soul nature which involves a focus on one's own feelings. For me it relates to being anxious about what one will eat and drink, it relates to that aspect of self that has not considered 'the birds of the air' and is therefore not a free expression of the soul.

Paul advises Timothy to avoid the ungodly chatter of Hymenaeus and Philetus.

Conclusion

These have been some reflections as we approach the conclusion of the Mystical Interval, which culminates next week with the celebration of Pentecost. I will finish with quotes from St Paul's letters to the Thessalonians. From Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians we read, 'God chose you from the beginning to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

And from the first letter we read, 'May the God of peace sanctify you wholly; and may your Spirit (pneuma) and Soul (psuche) and Body (soma) be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

So shall it be.

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