



Sermon – April 3, 2022
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

Matthew 6:1 – 4, 19 – 34

Philippians 4:6 - 7

Let me invite you to open your Bibles with me to Matthew chapter 6. And as you turn there, were you blessed this morning to have Ben Prater leading us in worship today? Absolutely. If you're a guest with us here for the first time, welcome home. It's a big Sunday for us because this week, we announced that we have two candidates that are going to be coming in in view of a call to be voted on this Wednesday and one of those was Ben Prater who just led us in worship. He's been here a time or two already during the last few months of the transition and the Lord has been working in his life and in the life of our church about the possibility of bringing him here. But you'll also notice on the screen next to him is Shane Mikeska, our missions candidate. Shane is not a stranger to Central. In fact, when he came through Texas A&M, this is where he met his wife at Central and the Lord worked through our college ministry to give him a heart for the nations. It's led him to spend over a decade overseas in Southeast Asia and in Europe with the International Mission Board and the Lord has been at work in bringing him back.

If you weren't with us this past Wednesday night, we had the opportunity to interview both of them during our Wednesday night Equip Class and I want to encourage you to look online and to catch the video of that just so you can familiarize yourself more with them. But also, I want to invite you, if you're a member of the church, to come and join us this Wednesday night at 6 o'clock over in the Family Life Center. That's where we'll be doing the vote for both of them. And we're trusting that God is at work. As you remember as we launched our 21 days of prayer focus last week, we talked about Psalm 43:2.

[²O Lord, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mount.](#)

And we talked about two church-wide prayers. One that God would raise up 54 men and women to step into our training program for the fall and that we would see two minister positions filled and the Lord has been at work even in this last week and we're trusting He will carry the completion what he's already started in our congregation. So, I want to invite you to join us on Wednesday for that.

Now, we're turning our attention back to Matthew 6. And as we do that, I want to invite you throughout the time of the message to grab one of these cards again that's in the seat back in front of you. I want to challenge you as you're going through the message today and hearing God's word that you might have a prayer request, a new one laid on your heart. Or perhaps there was an answered prayer that happened in response to one of your requests this week. I'd love for you to take some time and write down that specific prayer request or specific prayer answer because at the end of the message during the response time, we're going to invite you to come back to the steps again this Sunday and lay those at the Lord's feet as we continue to pray during this season.

Now, Matthew 6 takes our focus from prayer now to the topic of money and finances and that's fitting because we saw amazing numbers of prayers come in. My specific prayer coming in the last week is was that at least 300 of you would take a step to commit to this 21 days of prayer. And I was blown away that there were over 600 prayer cards left here at the steps last week. Doesn't that encourage you? To just see our people coming in prayer like that. In addition to that, as I looked at them, there are all sorts of amazing prayers that came in, even from children. There was one child who prayed that during these 21 days that they would lose their tooth. And we'll see if that one works out. Let me know, Caleb, if that happens. Then there was another child that wrote, drew a picture of their dog, and their specific prayer was that their dog would stop pooping in their house. Yeah, we've been talking about how specificity leads to visibility but I think on they want specificity to lead to invisibility. But I would say the number one prayer that I saw over and over again was for salvation. That God would work in miraculous ways to bring people to know Him including one who prayed for a family member over 90 years old who has not yet met Jesus and who is near death. I could see that longing in your heart. But following right on the heels of that desire for salvation, probably the most common theme in all the prayers as our staff read over each one of them and prayed specifically for each one of them this Monday during our staff meeting, the most common thread after salvation was that of anxiety, stress, fear, uncertainty. And perhaps nowhere does that hit closer to home than in the area of our finances and in our money. And so just for example, here were a couple of the prayers that came in. I prayed for God to take our financial worries away, to make a way for family to be secure in our future. Well, here's another one. I pray for a job for me as I recently am unemployed. I pray for the job the Lord knows will be right for me. Show me the path to pursue for my career. And as we turn our attention to Matthew 6, it's no surprise that surrounding this part about prayer we looked at last week, Jesus is talking about finances. He's talking about money. Because nothing will either drive us to God in prayer or drive us away from God in anxiety like our finances. They're constantly pulling at us. If you're a first-time guest with us, we're not a church that always talks about money but what we know is that God's word speaks to every aspect of our life and we want to come and bring our financial lives under His Lordship. That's why I want to invite you to start with me, in Matthew 6, beginning in verse 1. It says:

¹Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. ²“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know

what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Let's pray together.

Lord, we're coming to you right now, God. Right in this moment, asking for you to be at work, Father, that Your Spirit would invade our lives. That it would uproot anxiety, that it would uproot covetousness, that it would uproot greed, that it would uproot a desire for earthly success, and instead replace it with a heart for You. With a heart for Your cross. With the heart for Your Gospel. For a heart that's crucified and follows you by taking up our cross and following after the way of Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen.

So if you read throughout the Gospels, Jesus doesn't shy away from discussing money. In fact, about 40% of His parables have something to do with money. There's over 250 verses just in the Gospels that speak to our financial situation. And it's fitting that on the week after we talk about prayer, finances come up because that worry and anxiety that finances can bring in our life is nothing more than an invitation to trust Jesus to do what's best for you. Remember last week, we started off our days of prayer focus by reading through Jed Copping's books. And if you weren't able to get one last week, we prayed that they would multiply this week and we've got some back on the tables, in the Faith at Home Center and over in the Kids Ministry space. I want to encourage you to pick those up. But we talked last week about four keys to life-changing prayer. And what we're going to do this morning as we look at the way Jesus talks about finances is we're going to take those four keys to life-changing prayer and overlay them onto our financial situation. Our financial anxiety, our financial uncertainty. And so, I want you to notice the way that the text begins. It brings us to the first of these life-changing perspectives on money. It's this: believe that God can do anything in your financial situation. Believe that God can do anything in your financial situation. Remember last week, we saw the way that God is not only willing but able to provide for you. And perhaps nowhere is that more tested than when it comes to money. When we're always looking at how we're going to pay the bills or make ends meet or provide for our family or get ahead for retirement. There's this constant pull towards skepticism rather than belief and that shows up right here in the way that Jesus makes this contrast between those who are walking in hypocrisy with their money and those who are walking with humility in your money. And if we are going to believe that God can do anything in our finances, then, it shows up in at least two ways that you see right here. Look back at verse 2. You'll notice that Jesus tells us we need to believe that your finances are not all about you. Look at how he talks about the hypocrites in verse 2. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward. So, how do you know someone's a hypocrite when it comes to money? Well, it's because they're more concerned with their reputation on Earth than their reward in heaven. That's what Jesus drawing our attention to. That word reward there is another word for the term receipt. They've already been paid in full. They've already got what they're looking for. In other words, they're more interested in their giving on the basis of what they can get from it rather than what they can give from it. And Jesus is reminding us that our finances are not all about you. But notice also in verse 3, He tells us that we need to believe that our finances are not all for you. So, notice how verse 3 starts.

³But when you give to the needy,

Jesus is reminding us of an expectation of donation. You see, the phrase there is not if you give to the needy but when you give to the needy. There is this expectation not here just in the teaching of Jesus but throughout the Bible. That God's people respond to God's blessing by investing in God's mission. So, when you look back at the Old Testament, you see this model and pattern of the people of God, giving of their first and best to God, bringing the tithe to Him, 10%. And nowhere in the New Testament do you see that pattern revoked. In fact, in the early church, you see them giving joyfully even beyond that of everything, that they have and that's what Jesus is speaking of here. And the reason for that is because our giving is one of the best windows into our heart to show whether or not we truly believe that God can do anything in our financial situation. There was a study that came out not long ago of Christians between the ages of 25 and 40 about giving. And it found that Christians to our credit give three times more than non-Christians do. That's really good news. But here were some of the concerning things that showed up. Only 44%, less than half, said their faith influenced their decisions with their finances. And get this, even though 56%, a little bit over half, agreed that the Bible teaches that they should tithe or give faithfully of their money to the church, 67%, more than two out of three, didn't give a dime to their local church at all. What we believe doesn't always match our behavior and when that's true, it reveals the kind of pull towards hypocrisy that Jesus is warning us about here with our money. Do we believe that God can do anything in our financial situation? Well, how do you know that? Look back at verse 4. It says to us,

⁴And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

In other words, do you want to know if you believe that God can do anything in your future financial situation? The best indicator of what you believe about the future is what you're practicing in the present because if you're not faithfully giving now, what makes you think you'll finally be faithful in giving then? I mean, I know what it's like. You're saying if I can just reach this point, then, I'll turn it all over to God. Maybe for you that is once I graduate or once I get that better job or once we finally find a house in this difficult housing market or once my stock portfolio finally rebounds or once this inflation down or once we saved enough for retirement, we just keep pushing it off and pushing it off. And the reality is that is not a budget issue, it's a belief issue. Do you believe that God can meet your needs in your financial situation even if you faithfully give? See, the challenge that Jesus is laying out that way of humility is one where we see Jesus as both worthy and willing. That the mission is worth investing in and that God can meet our needs when we invest in it. Here's the reality, Central Family, almost everyone of us is going to go to the grave with more than we can take with us. So, why not invest it in a mission that lasts? See, He calls us to believe that God can do anything in our financial situation but notice how it goes on here beginning down in verse nineteen. Slide there with me, you'll see the second key that we need to notice this morning: embrace your child-like identity in your financial situation. Embrace your childlike identity in your financial situation. So, here's what it says starting verse 19:

¹⁹“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²²“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³but if your eye is bad, your

whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is the darkness! ²⁴“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

One of the joyful things as your pastor this week has been to hear some of the ways that God has been at work in these 21 days of prayer and I heard a great story about a legacy adult woman in our church. She had gone to the gym down in South College Station and taken her copy of this book with her and she was working out. And a friend of mine who had never met her saw her, went and introduced himself to her, told her how great it was he thought that it was that she was reading a book on prayer. And he said, “Hey, if you’re back here the same time as me tomorrow, if you bring your book back, I want to sit next to you on the exercise bikes while we workout and I want to hear you read that chapter out loud and we’ll learn together.” So, sure enough, they show up the next day, same time, same place, and this legacy adult woman gets next to this middle-aged man who’s very fit and she opens up to chapter three and begins reading. And she probably has to take a few breaks along the way to just keep the energy up and read the entire chapter to him. At which I was thinking, number one, that’s amazing. Number two, you could probably run a marathon right now, why weren’t you the one taking the book and reading to her instead? But what I thought was so fascinating is that the chapter they were on was the one about embracing our child-like identity and that’s exactly what Jesus is speaking about here in verses 19 to 24 when it comes to our finances. What does it look like to pursue God’s provision like a child? Well, what you’ll notice in verses 19 through 21 is that we need to embrace child-like boldness as we pursue the right treasure. So, remember, Jesus draws this contrast between earthly treasure and heavenly treasure. The earthly treasure is temporary. It’s treacherous but that heavenly treasure is eternal. It’s permanent. It’s protected and why is it that He says we should lay up our treasure in heaven and not on earth? Look back at verse 21. He says,

²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In other words, the location of your treasure reveals the motivation of your heart. And if you have the right aim, it will fuel the right audacity. If you build your life on the right basis, it will fuel the right boldness. He says, we need a child-like boldness in pursuing the right treasure. But look down beginning in verse 22. You also see him telling us we need to embrace child-like dependence as we pursue the right master. So, notice he talks about seeing the light in verses 22 and 23 and then he turns his attention to this idea of who our master is in verse 24 when he says,

²⁴No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

So, how do you know if you’re serving God or money? If you can’t do them both at the same time, how can you tell the difference? Well, Jesus is reminding us of the reality that whichever one consumes our first and best thoughts and energy, that’s the one that is our master. And if we want to trust God with our finances, it involves embracing a child-like dependence that God will provide for us as we pursue the right master. On Friday night, I was in uncharted territory. As you know, we’re raising four boys at home. So, I’ve never darkened the door of a dad-and-daughter dance until this last Friday night right up here in the Family Life Center at Central. I

just wanted to come see what the action was. 500 dads and their kids. I just thought it'd be an amazing time and so I stepped in there and before I went in to the gym where the main activity was going on, I took a restroom break and I walked into the bathroom and it was like a war zone. It's like a bomb had gone off in there and it dawned on me. Yeah, you got dads in there changing diapers when they may not be the most skilled at that. You've got people trying to help them go into the stalls and use the restroom. There was this child-like desperation in there from those children needing help from a loving father. And then, I walked into the gym itself and it moved from a war zone to a fun zone because we had a candy bar over here. We had an ice cream bar over there. A photo booth. We had a dance floor. Who says Baptists can't dance? And there was just amazing fun and I saw dads doing things they would never normally do in any other circumstance. But because their child had come to them with a bold request, they did it not for the reward but for the relationship. For that connection. Because their heart was for their child and that's the type of picture that Jesus is trying to give us here of the need for childlike dependence and childlike boldness. That when we look at our finances, we look to our Father and say to Him, "We believe You can do all things. So, will you do it again in my financial situation today?" And that's why Jesus keeps going down in verse 25 to remind us of a third thing we need to keep in mind when it comes to our money and it's this; specify your request about your financial situation. We need to specify our request about our financial situation. So, let's see how he talks about it here.

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? ²⁶Look 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? ²⁷And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰But 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?

So, when we kicked off the 21 days of prayer last week, we talked about this pull towards specificity because as our book has been teaching us, specificity leads to visibility. It's the platform, the opportunity for the invisible God to become visible in our lives and perhaps that shows up nowhere greater as a danger than in our finances. A danger of what Jed has been talking about in the book of vague prayer syndrome. God, would you provide for me? Would you bless our family financially? Would you meet our needs? I mean, those are all right and good prayers but they're vague. You wouldn't know if God had showed up and answered them as a result of that prayer and the pull here that Jesus is drawing us to is towards specific prayer in at least two ways about our financial situation. In verses 25 and 6, He's calling us to pray specifically about the problems in your financial situation. So, what are those problems that we see there back in the middle of verse 25? Do you see it? What will you eat or what will you drink nor about your body, what you will put on. Now, these are huge problems. These are the basic necessities of life. Without them, you cannot live and Jesus is speaking to those problems and he is reminding us of what happens as a result of them; anxiety, stress, fear. We all know what that's like with our money. Whether it's about a fear of losing a job or the credit card debt that's mounting up on you or the stock market drop or the inflation you're experiencing or the

unexpected expenses come on your scene. There is a specific source of anxiety. So, there ought to be a specific prayer about that anxiety. It's one of the reasons I want you to continue to prayerfully consider right now how you want to fill out this card today. If you haven't already written down an answer, you want to specify a request, or note an answer to prayer that God might move. Whether it's within finances or in any other problem in your life. Jesus is speaking to the heart of that. But it's not just about our problems, He also down in verse 27, calls us to pray specifically about our plans in our financial situation. So, notice how it picks up. It's not just about our current problems but our future plans. That's why He says in verse 27,

²⁷which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸And why are you anxious about clothing?

So, He confronts both our days and our dress, both our weeks and our wardrobe. These future things that we need, these plans that we have, and He is doing it in a way that challenges us to pursue God specifically to pray particularly. And I just can't help but wonder, have you been there before? Have you been at that spot of desperation? Where you look into your future, you focus on your plans, and you say, I don't know how this is going to work unless God makes a way. Have you been there? And in that moment, the question is, am I going to turn away from God and anxiety or to God in specific prayer? See, Jesus is reminding us of the way that God provides. He talks about the birds of the air, the flowers of the field. They can't plan. They can't pray and yet God provides. So, how much more will he do that in our own lives? You see these financial problems and plans that spark anxiety in our life. They showed up over and over again in the prayer cards that people filled out last week. As I looked through these and prayed over them with the staff, here are a couple that came in that fit right in this that Jesus is addressing. One person prayed to God. "Help me to know what to do with my finances to get them in a better shape and pay off my bills. And help me to say "No" to the things that I don't need." Someone else said, "I want to pray for financial peace and guidance to do God's will with my money. I want to listen to God and trust that He will never fail." How about one more? "Lord, I am struggling. I'm missing the purpose you have for me. I feel so empty. I'm missing the hope and joy and just going through the motions. I also pray that you would bring a job to my husband that he needs. He is struggling with stress and rejection. Please, comfort and guide him." Have you been there before? Are you there right now? I want you to see on the screen the word that the Scripture speaks to us from Philippians 4 that strengthens us. It's what, the passage that Tim shared from earlier today. What happens when we pray specifically about our financial problems and plans? Here's what it says.

⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your heart and your minds in Christ Jesus.

So, Paul tells us that when we pray our plans, when we pray our problems, that our problems are often replaced by provision. That our plans are often replaced by peace. But even if they're not, God may not always change your circumstances but he can change your heart. Which brings us to the last dimension of life-changing prayer applied to our finances. We need to see back in Matthew 6. It starts in verse 31 and the fourth thing I want you to notice this morning is that we are called to trust God to do what's best in our financial situation. To trust God to do what's best in our financial situation. So, here's how Jesus finishes the section. Verse 31,

³¹Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³²For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³But 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.

So, think about what Jesus is calling us to do. To believe that God can do anything. To embrace our child-like identity. To specify our prayer request, but even if we do those things, it's no guarantee that God will give us what we want. Jesus is not some health and wealth preacher that says, if you have enough faith, you'll have enough finances. He doesn't guarantee that just because you ask, you will receive in the way that you desire. And so at the heart of that reality, when we come to God in prayer, Jesus is calling us to trust. To trust for God to do what is best in your financial situation. And why should we trust him? Well, notice here, the first reason we should trust God with our financial situation according to verse 31 is because he knows our needs. So, listen to Jesus' command there. He says there, therefore, do not be anxious. Six different times in this passage. Just call to not be anxious shows up and you might be sitting there in the audience or watching by video and saying, “That’s easy for you to say, pastor. But you don’t understand the situation I’m in.” And I don’t understand the situation you have. But I know He does. And I know He sees your need even better than you do. He’s not trying to dismiss the need but to dignify it. In fact, verse 32 tells us why we shouldn’t be anxious when it says, your heavenly father knows that you need them all. In other words, God knows your needs better than you do. And He knows a way to meet your needs better than you do. It’s one of the things I loved about one of the chapters this week in the book. Jed quotes from a pastor named Tim Keller who says this, he says, “God will either give us what we ask or give us what we would have asked if we knew everything He knows.” He knows our needs. We can trust Him because He knows our needs. But notice the way the passage finishes because in verse 33, it’s also telling us we can trust God in our financial situation not just because he knows our needs but because he knows our future. So, notice down in verse 34, He knows the problems in our future. That’s why he says, therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. In other words, Jesus is acknowledging there will be challenges ahead. There will be trouble. There will be hardship. But the reason we’re called to trust is not just because He knows our needs but because He knows our future. And we see that not just in the fact He knows our future problems but He knows our future provision and that’s what it talks about there in verse 33. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you. You see, everyone of us is faced with two choices in this life. And then here is what it is. Will we seek the things of this world in which all we are guaranteed is anxiety? Or will we seek the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, seek the kingdom and His righteousness, and all we will receive is what God believes is best for us. Do you find yourself in that season of uncertainty? That anxiety? Do you find yourself trapped in secret sin? Are you ready to take a step towards finding freedom from that? Well, there’s something I want to challenge you if you find yourself saying yes to that whether it’s in finances or even more broadly in your life right now. If you’re saying, I need a turning point with God. I wanted to challenge you to take a step right after the worship service is done because today, upstairs in our B wing for men in B204 and women in B206, were kicking off a brand-new life group. It’s called Groundwork. It’s connected to our re|generation program. And

if you're finding yourself wrestling with wanting to confront the root issues under your hardships, your hangups, your hurts, whether that's financial anxiety, or secret sin, or other challenges you face. I want to challenge you to take a first step by going and experiencing that Groundwork group today. For men, it's in B204. For women, it's in B206 right now, during the life group hour. Because it's going to help provide some of the foundation for trust that Jesus is calling us to here in this moment. You know one of the reasons why we struggle so much with anxiety about our finances, about the debt we owe financially? It's because that debt we owe financially is a constant reminder to us of the debt we owe to God spiritually. And think about the way that the Scripture talks about it. That the wages of sin is death. That when we walk away from God in disobedience, it is building up a debt that we owe to him that we can never pay. But the beauty of the Gospel this Easter season is that Jesus changes everything. He takes the death that you earned and He pays for it Himself on the cross. Sacrificing Himself for the sins that you've committed, for the sins of the whole world, so that we might find the freedom we've been longing for. Not through financial success, not through our own strength, but through the Son of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. We've seen a number of answered prayers come in this week and I pray that as you fill out these cards, we'll see a few more and there's just one in particular I want to draw your attention to. It's a husband and wife in a tight financial spot and their car, the card tells us that last week, their car broke down and so they began to pray for God to provide. Have you ever been there before? You're just scraping along and then that shock to your financial system comes and you don't know what's going to happen. So, listen how they prayed. He said, my wife prayed for a specific price for a vehicle we wanted, and get this, God delivered that vehicle at that exact price in an unexpected way. Wow. In fact, it goes on to say as they as they celebrated that way that that specificity led to visibility. The card said, we were able to share this answered prayer with the salesman and we're now praying that this planted a seed that God can water to call him to know Jesus. That's what it looks like to not worry about tomorrow. That's what it looks like to seek first the kingdom. See, what Jesus is calling us to in this call to trust is to recognize that we may not always get what we want. But when we follow Jesus, we will always have what we need. And we can we can rest in that reality this morning as we turn to him in prayer.

Let's pray together.

Father, even now as we ready our hearts to respond to Your word. Lord, I pray for freedom for those who maybe entrapped to sin, overwhelmed by anxiety. Lord, I lift up the men and women who will come forward in just a moment to pray at these steps, these specific prayers, to celebrate these specific answers. God, would You continue to work over these 21 days in a way that gives us a glimpse of Your goodness in our lives? And we ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.