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DEVOTION ON MATTHEW 6:24–34

INTERNATIONAL LUTHERAN COUNCIL — 2015 WORLD CONFERENCE, BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

by Lawrence R. Rast, Jr.

The Sermon on the Mount, while it challenges us to live a certain kind of life, defines that life first of all in the person and work of Jesus Himself.

YESTERDAY MORNING BISHOP VOIGT pointed us to the story of the Good Samaritan and opened our hearts to the challenges and the needs that surround us. Reverend Streltsov then noted the challenges that the Lutheran confession faces in the world today. In line with those presentations and the conversations that have followed, I think it would be appropriate for us to consider this text from Matthew 6. This is a *most* fitting text for a gathering of the International Lutheran Council (ILC). Please hear it once more:

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. 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? 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? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour 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 you 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 after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his

righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

The context for our text today is a familiar one. The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most beloved sections of the Gospels — of the whole Bible — and one of the most

challenging. If you take the Sermon on the Mount as simple instruction in ethical living, you will quickly find that what it demands are beyond what you can accomplish. What Jesus requires of us here is something that is beyond the capacity of sinful human beings. For example, earlier in His sermon, Jesus spoke the beatitudes:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Well, I’m pretty poor, spiritually and monetarily. So I must be doing okay.

“Blessed are the meek.” Well, if you know me I’m not all that meek, but I’m trying.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” Sometimes I hunger for these things but not as often as I would like.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” Now things are getting serious. I’m not very merciful.

“Blessed are the pure in heart.” Okay, now I am unmasked. I am not pure in heart. As I look into myself, I see that I do not have a pure heart. And all too often the

Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for all your tomorrows are already established in the unwavering promise of Christ.

impurities of my heart express themselves in thoughts, words and deeds that are at odds with God's Law as He reveals it in the Scriptures.

But Jesus doesn't stop there. He goes on in His sermon to expand on the fullness of keeping the Law by, among other examples, telling us to love our enemies and not to call people idiots, because that is equal to murder. In the face of these words, even my small efforts at the victorious Christian life begin to fade. You would think that would be enough. But chapter 6 extends the commentary by teaching us how to pray, instructing us on how to fast (when's the last time you did that voluntarily?) and challenging us to lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven.

At the end of all this comes our text. "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." This is the bottom line. Jesus successfully shows that my heart is divided and that I am at war within myself. I do not serve God with my whole hearts and I do not love my neighbor as myself. In fact, I serve myself.

Then, strangely, Jesus completely changes course: "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." Given all that we've heard, how is it that I cannot be anxious?

Personally speaking, I am anxious about many things. I am anxious about the well-being of the seminary I serve as president, Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I am anxious about the future of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. I am anxious about the state of culture in the United States and the western world as a whole. And I am anxious about the orthodox Lutheran confession in this troubled and confused world.

We are surrounded by the cares and trials of this world, and the temptation is to become so entwined with that we miss the gracious provision and care that God so richly pours out upon us each and every day, feeding us with His Word, giving us His body and blood to eat and drink and clothing us in the righteousness of the Crucified and Risen One. Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for all your tomorrows are already established in the unwavering promise of Christ. This is Christ's promise to each of us here at this meeting and to each person in the

churches under our care. God is using this conference as a blessing to us as we gather to learn and hand over the faith once delivered to the saints.

That is not to minimize the challenges. For we serve in a rapidly changing cultural context — one that is increasingly *indifferent* to the Church and the message Christ has entrusted to it; indeed, as we hold up Christ it is more and more likely that each of us will find ourselves persecuted for our confession. As that happens to you, remember the words of Jesus on this point from the beatitudes: "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

So be of good cheer! For in the end, the Sermon on

the Mount, while it challenges us to live a certain kind of life, defines that life first of all in the person and work of Jesus Himself. He is the one who, though He was rich, became poor. He is the one who mourns over His broken people and who meekly went to the cross in our place because of His hunger and thirst that we might be declared righteous. He is merciful and pure in heart and by His death and resurrection makes peace with God, so that we, who are persecuted by the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh, know that the kingdom

He is merciful and pure in heart and by His death and resurrection makes peace with God, so that we, who are persecuted by the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh, know that the kingdom of heaven is indeed ours.

of heaven is indeed ours.

Therefore, my friends in Christ, "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? ... 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?" God has clothed you in the righteousness of Christ and now His life shapes and transforms your life into one of service in His name.

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