

**Sermon on the Mount**  
**Mastering Materialism, Part 4**  
**Matthew 6:25-34**  
**August 18, 2013**  
*Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher*  
*Countryside Bible Church*

In every age, clothing has been one of the basic necessities of life. Today they tell us that the U.S. clothing and footwear industry accounts for a combined annual revenue of 350 billion dollars. The first human clothing was much simpler than that. It was basically fig leaves sewn together by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Genesis chapter 3: 7 says, "...they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings." Later, of course, on that same day, God Himself made them more permanent clothing of animal skin. Down in verse 21 of that same chapter, it says, "The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them."

Ever since the fall, humans have by divine design worn clothing. Primarily we clothe ourselves for four purposes: for modesty – that was the reason for the first clothing. As Adam and Eve became aware of their sin, as they became aware of the relationship that had been fractured both between themselves and with God, their first inclination was to clothe themselves. That is still one of the primary purposes of clothing although in our culture many have forgotten that. In addition, protection – that is, the protection of our bodies from the elements and the things around. Thirdly, status – clothing has always been some kind of a statement about the group to which I belong or which I lead. And then we clothe ourselves also for beauty or for decoration, for adornment. For most, in most cases, we don't simply wear what we wear strictly for utilitarian purposes, but we want it to also be attractive. As we'll see, that's part of God's design as well.

Now without question then, clothing is a necessity of life. Tragically, as with all of the other needs of the body, clothing too can become an idol. People often continue to accumulate more than they need and more than they will ever reasonably use. It's interesting. Job in Job 27:16

describes the wicked as those who “prepare garments as plentiful as the clay.” In other words, they have more clothes than dirt. It’s just “collect clothing.”

Although our desire for clothing can become excessive and even idolatrous, in the text that we come to today, our Lord affirms that clothing is essential for life in this world. And just as God Himself has provided clothing for Adam and Eve in the Garden, He will certainly continue to provide clothing for His own children. In the second half of Matthew 6, Jesus is addressing the dangers of materialism, the dangers that are inherent in material things. And in verses 25 to 34, He is specifically teaching us how to overcome those dangers, because often materialism begins with worry. It begins with worry about having the things that we need for this life and it grows into a monster that consumes and controls us. And so He gets to the root, here, of the issue.

Let’s read it again together. You follow along as I begin in verse 25 of Matthew 6.

“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; 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.”

Now this paragraph, as we've noted, begins with Jesus' simple command to us not to worry about the needs of this life. Notice in verse 25. "Do not be worried about your life, what you're going to eat, what you're going to drink, or about what you're going to wear." The rest of the paragraph is a series of arguments as Jesus presents His arguments for not worrying about the needs of this life.

Now today, Lord willing, we will finish the first and longest of these arguments for not worrying and it's the argument from God's character. Essentially, the argument is this: you don't need to worry about your future needs being met because you can trust your Father. Jesus reminds us of what our Father is like and what He's done. He says, "You don't need to worry because, after all, it is the Father who gave you life itself. And if He gave you life, is He not going to give you what you need to sustain that life? If He gave you the greater, is He not going to give you the lesser?" He says, "You can trust your Father because it's your Father who feeds all living things. He will certainly feed you. Think about the birds. God feeds the birds. You're far more valuable than they are. You're made in the image of God. You're His own child. He's going to care for you. He's going to feed you. He's going to get you the food that you need."

Jesus says, "You don't need to worry because it is your Father, after all, who has already determined your lifespan." We worry about those things because we don't think we're going to have enough to extend to the end of life. And Jesus says, "Listen. God's already decided the end of life. Your Father's determined that day and He will meet your needs until that day comes." This is what we examined last time. Verse 27. "And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?" This is about God's sovereignty - His sovereignty over the length of your life and over your death. And specifically, we looked at the three ways that sovereignty expresses itself. We said that God has established the normal length of human life. Moses, writing fourteen hundred years before Christ, thirty-five hundred years ago, said man's life normally extends from seventy to eighty years. That's the length of a normal life. Thirty-five hundred years later, taking out infant mortality, around this globe, if a person endures past childhood, that's the normal average length of human life. God's determined that. He sovereignly decided that.

God also has authority over the reality of death. He is the One who decreed death as a result of the fall and He controls death. He is sovereignly in charge of death. It belongs to Him. God says, “I kill and I make alive.” Jesus our Lord says in Revelation 1, “I hold the keys (the authority) over death and the grave.” And so He has the authority over death itself.

And finally we said that God’s sovereignty over death means that He also has determined the specifics of every person’s death. He knows the day you will die, He has determined that, and how you will die. David says in Psalm 139, “The days that were ordained for me (the days, God, You appointed for me were all written in Your book), when as yet there was not one of them.” Before you were ever born, God knew down to the day the length of your life.

So Jesus says, “No one by worrying about the length of his life can add (literally) a single cubit (a single eighteen-inch period) to the end of his life” – a short period of time. In fact, if you’re trying to be a reasonable steward of your life, then in whatever circumstances you find yourself, you are safe until it is God’s time. On the other hand, you can worry your whole life about the length of your life and you can use extreme measures to try to preserve your life. But when it’s God’s time, nothing you have done or will do will prevent that time. So don’t worry about your health. Don’t worry about the length of your life. Instead, trust your Father. Whatever you determine before the Lord is a reasonable stewardship of your life, fine. Do that. But let me warn you: don’t ever put your confidence in those things that you’ve decided to do to be a steward of your life.

I was reminded this last week of the passage in 2 Chronicles 16:12 about King Asa. You remember this? “In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe (probably, gangrene set in as a result of a complicating illness of some kind), yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians.” What an indictment! Even facing death, he put his confidence in the physicians and not in the Lord. Let me put it to you this way. If you put your confidence for your health or for your longevity anywhere but God, if you place your confidence in doctors and medicine, if you place your confidence in those vitamins you take, if you put your confidence in the exercise that you perform for your body, in some

elixir or in oils or in some special diet, if you place your confidence anywhere but God – you have badly misplaced your confidence.

You say, “How do you know if you’re putting more confidence in those things than you are in God?” Let me give you a simple test. Do you think and talk more about how God is sustaining your health or do you talk far more about that solution that you think you have found and how it is sustaining your health? Are you more evangelistic about your health solution or about God and His power in your life? If your confidence is anywhere but God – let me put it to you bluntly – you are stealing God’s glory, because He’s the One who has given you health and He’s the One who has extended your life. Give Him and Him alone the credit and the glory.

Now today we come to the fourth part of Jesus’ argument from God’s character. You don’t need to worry about the future needs being met because our Father clothes all creation. Jesus begins in verse 28 with a reminder not to worry. “And why are you worried about clothing?” You remember back up in verse 25 Jesus commanded us not to worry about all of the physical needs of this life and He included clothing in the list there. And now He comes back to this issue of clothing specifically. In verse 26, He addressed the issue of food. Now in the first century, worrying about food – that is, not the preparation of it, but having enough and how to get it – was a man’s worry in the first century. But here in verses 28 to 30, Jesus addresses the issue of clothing. And in the first century, this was primarily a woman’s worry, a woman’s responsibility. So in dealing with this issue of worry, Jesus is taking no prisoners here. He’s getting everybody in the audience. He deals with a traditional concern that men would have had, and now He’s dealing with a traditional or typical concern that a woman in the first century would have worried about as well.

The need to clothe the family created worry and anxiety for several different reasons in the first century – first and most obviously, because the process of making clothes in the ancient world was extremely time-consuming. Think about all the conveniences you have. Imagine life without those conveniences - being responsible for running a home and making sure that your family is cared for and that you have sufficient food on the table prepared for them to eat. And in the middle of all of that, there is the continuing need to make sure that they’re adequately clothed.

Winter is coming. Think about what had to happen for them to have clothes. First of all, most of them wore wool clothes. The wool would have had to have been sheared from the sheep. And then it would have had to have been combed to remove the tangles. And then the individual strands would have had to have been spun into thread. And then the thread would have had to have been woven on this rudimentary loom into fabric. Once the fabric was made, then you pounded it to soften it with a fuller's mallet. And then once that was done, then if you wanted any color to it, you dyed the fabric. Only then were you ready to cut that fabric into pieces and to sew it into a garment. Very time-consuming.

But there was another cause for worry about clothing in the first century and that was the cost involved, because you either had to have enough sheep to provide the wool you needed for the clothes for your family (and if you had a larger household as well) or you had to have sufficient money in order to go buy that wool from someone else. So they worried.

Notice verse 28. Jesus' question makes it very clear that the disciples He was talking to that day on the hillside north of the Sea of Galilee were worrying consistently about their clothing. "Why are you worried about clothing?" But His question also implies that such worry about clothing was illogical in light of the kind of Father that we have. So in order to build our confidence in God, to strengthen our faith in God's provision for our needs, Jesus here borrows an illustration from nature: specifically, an illustration from wildflowers. Look at verse 28. "Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin..." Once again, Jesus borrows an illustration from His surroundings. Remember He's preaching this sermon in a cove on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. Those of you who are travelling with us to Israel next year will stand in what is most likely the spot. There aren't many possibilities along the northern shore there. And as He was teaching on that northern shore, that area is often populated by wildflowers and He points to them.

That expression 'lilies of the field' is somewhat ambiguous. We can't be exactly sure what kind of flowers these were. Scholars suggest a variety of different kinds of flowers –the crown anemone, the poppy, the iris, the narcissus, and the gladiola, or gladiolus, I should say. My personal favorite are the anemones. They are beautiful and they are very common in that part of

Galilee. Although we can't be certain which flower Jesus had in mind, we can be certain that He was referring to an uncultivated plant. He was referring to something that grew wild that people didn't tend, that God tended; in other words, a wildflower. Throughout much of the year, wildflowers of various kinds can be seen across the Galilee.

So as Jesus taught that day, He pointed around Him and He said, "Observe how the wildflowers grow." Specifically, He said notice that "they don't toil." In other words, they don't wear themselves out in labor to produce that clothing that they wear. "Nor do they spin;" that is, they don't go through the laborious process of spinning yarn and making fabric and sewing their clothing. Verse 29. "Yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these." Now the Old Testament doesn't mention Solomon's clothing specifically and directly, but it does describe the magnificence and grandeur that surrounded Solomon in every way, and so this would have been true as well. By the first century, if you wanted to point out the grandeur of something, you compared it to Solomon. In addition to that, remember Jesus was not only fully human, came into the world in the womb of Mary in the first century, but He was also the eternal Son of God. Jesus knew Solomon and He makes this assertion, "I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these."

Think about what Jesus is saying here. He's saying if you could travel back in time and if you could walk into the royal closet in the palace of Solomon and you could choose the one outfit that most portrayed the grandeur and magnificence of Solomon, and you were to have him put that garment on and you were to stand Solomon in that garment in the middle of that field of wildflowers there on the north side of the Sea of Galilee – at his most magnificent, Solomon was never clothed as beautifully as a single wildflower, as "one of these," Jesus says. No clothing stained with man-made dyes can ever approach the brilliant colors and hues and detail with which God has painted the most insignificant flowers.

Now hit the pause button for a moment because I want to pause from our study of this passage and underscore an important point that is not the primary point of this passage, but I think it's a very important one for us to deal with. Our God is a lover of beauty. Clearly there are many Christians who are excessive in their pursuit of beauty and fashion. And Paul warns against this,

doesn't he? First Timothy 2, he says that when the church comes together for corporate worship, "Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly (When you come together, you're to be modest. You're not to do what will cause people around you to be distracted or even to sin.) and discreetly (that is, you don't dress in such a way as to parade your wealth)..." He goes on to describe emblems of wealth in the first century: "braided hair, gold, pearls, costly garments." Don't dress in a way that's designed to show off and parade your success and wealth, "but rather by means of good works..." Let your clothing be good works.

First Peter 3. Peter says the same thing. He says,

Your adornment must not be merely external – braiding the hair, wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; (instead worry about the beauty of your soul) but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet (or a gentle and a calm) spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

So understand this: there is a very real danger of pursuing clothing and beauty and appearance to excess. But among Christians, there is an equally wrong response on the other end of the spectrum. There are Christians – and I think a growing number of Christians – who are strictly utilitarian. Does it work? When it comes to clothes, they think purely in terms of functionality. There are Christians who take 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3 too far and they equate godliness with plain and drab, like the Quakers or the Amish. Listen. That is not the character of our God. That is not who He is. So much of what we see around us in creation is not about functionality; it's simply about beauty. Our God is a God of beauty and He's clothed His creation in that beauty.

It's interesting. I wouldn't make too much of this, but it's just an interesting passage in Exodus 28: 2. It's talking about the clothing of the high priest. And God says, "I want the high priest to be clothed in a certain way and I want it to serve two purposes. I want it to serve for glory (that is, for dignity, for nobility) and for beauty." In Proverbs 31: 22, you remember the virtuous woman makes coverings for herself. "Her clothing is fine linen and purple." In Ezekiel 16:10, God describes how He as a husband has clothed His wife Israel. Listen to the metaphoric language He uses. "I also clothed you with embroidered cloth and put sandals of porpoise skin on your feet; and I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk."



What am I saying? It boils down to this: when it comes to clothing, don't go to either extreme. Don't spend all of your time and effort on external beauty and neglect the beauty of your soul. On the other hand, don't mistake plain and drab for godly and spiritual. That's contrary to the character of God.

So that's my soap box. Let's climb down off the soap box. You can hit the play button again. Let's come back to Jesus' illustration of the wildflowers and specifically to the point of His illustration. Look at verse 30. "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?" Now the phrase 'grass of the field' here is broader than the 'lilies of the field' in the previous verse. The 'grass of the field' includes not only wildflowers, but the grasses that grow, as well as even weeds. Jesus' point is that God clothes all of His creation, including every single wildflower, every blade of wild grass and every weed. God is the designer, the weaver and the provider of the clothing for everything that lives. And God has magnificently clothed the grass of the field. And what makes that especially remarkable is its short lifespan. I mean, think for a moment about how short the lifespan of bluebonnets is here in Texas. You know, they spring up, and we all jump in our cars and run to the hill country to see them while they're there. They're just there for a very short period of time and look at how God has clothed them. That's what Jesus is saying.

By the way, this is why throughout Scripture grass and wildflowers are often used as a metaphor for the brevity of life. For example in Psalm 103:15,

As for man, his days are like grass;  
As a wildflower of the field, so he flourishes.  
When the wind has passed over it, it is no more,  
And its place acknowledges it no longer.

I saw this firsthand in southern California. I lived there for sixteen years and the climate and the growing seasons in California are very much like Israel. And what happens is, in February and March the spring rains come. And as soon as the spring rains come, the hills begin to be carpeted with this magnificent green blanket of grass and the wildflowers pop up. And we call it the sucker season in California; you know, all the tourists come and think it's always like that, but

it's just a short period of time because then the rains stop. The winds off the desert begin to blow. The humidity drops to about fifteen to twenty percent. And in a very short period of time, those hills that just a few short weeks before were carpeted with green are now dried and brown and those wildflowers have shriveled up and died.

In the first century in Israel, they gathered that dried, dead grass and those withered wildflowers and they used them to fuel their cooking fires. In fact, look at verse 30. You see the word 'furnace?' That, the Greek word for 'furnace,' actually describes a small, domestic oven that was used for cooking food. It was shaped like a cylinder, but it was larger at its base. And at the bottom, into it often they would put dried grasses and all the wildflowers that had shriveled along with whatever wood they could find. And once the oven was hot enough inside with this blaze, they scraped the ashes out and then they took those flat loaves of bread and they spread them on the outside of that oven as well as on the inside to cook their bread.

“If God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven (to use it to heat for cooking), will He not much more clothe you?” Here He's arguing from the lesser to the greater. If God does this for the flowers, the wildflowers, and the grass of the fields, is He not going to do that for you? God magnificently clothes the grass of the field with amazing designs, with brilliant colors and textures and hues. In fact, let me challenge you to do something I did this week. Go online and look for the photos of flower petals under an electron microscope. They're beautiful to see just with the human eye, but the detail and beauty under an electron microscope is amazing. Jesus says, “If God does that for grass which is unproductive and short-lived, don't you think He will clothe you who are made in His image, and especially since He has adopted you as His own children? What kind of Father do you think You have?” The God who's created and who sustains such a beautiful and magnificent universe can be fully trusted to meet the basic needs of His disciples.

I mean, after all, in Genesis 3, it was God who clothed Adam and Eve. In Genesis 28:20, it was God who clothed Jacob. Jacob says, “God gives me my food and God gives me clothing to wear.” In Deuteronomy 10:18, God makes it clear that He provides clothing for all, especially for those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. “He executes justice for the orphan and the widow,

and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.” God is the One who clothes us. Those clothes that you’re wearing this morning? Those are a gift from God your Creator to you.

Now how exactly does God clothe us? Well, as He did with food, there are basically three ways that God clothes us. First of all, usually God provides the clothing that we need through the income and resources that He gives us to make or to buy the clothes that we need. You see, God’s given you skill. God’s given you a job. God’s given you income from that job. That is God’s way of providing for your needs. And this is how we’re normally cared for. In fact, in Exodus chapter 21:10, God lays out the responsibilities for a husband. This is one list; there are others that we could add. But here in this passage, He says a husband is responsible to provide three things for his wife. He’s responsible to provide food, he’s responsible to provide conjugal rights, and he’s responsible to provide clothing. Proverbs 31:22 says that the virtuous woman, from the income that God has provided, makes for herself clothing. This is how God usually provides for our clothing. It’s through the normal work that He has allowed to do – the skills that He’s given us, the jobs He’s provided. We provide for our families, but it’s not ultimately we who are providing. It’s God who’s using those mechanisms to provide.

Sometimes, secondly, when we find ourselves without jobs or without adequate resources, God provides for our clothing through others. Job in Job 31:19 states that he had never allowed anyone in his circle of influence to perish for lack of clothing. He had never allowed the needy to have no covering. In Ezekiel 18:7, we read that the righteous man “covers the naked with clothing.”

Turn to Matthew 25. We have Jesus looking ahead to the time at the end of the tribulation when He returns in the second coming. Verse 31. “...when the Son of Man comes in His glory... He will sit on His glorious throne.” And there’s a judgment that takes place at the end of the tribulation. It’s usually called the judgment of the nations, but it’s a judgment of individuals. And verse 34. “...the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’” By the way, this shows that nobody merits getting into this kingdom by their efforts. It was prepared before the

foundation of the world for them. It's grace. But those who belong to God do righteous things. And so He says, verse 35. "For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in;" Verse 36. "[I was] naked (Jesus says to these people), and you clothed Me..." Verse 37. "...the righteous will say, 'Lord, when...' Verse 38. "...when did we see You...naked, and clothe You?" Verse 40. "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'" We are responsible to care for our brothers and sisters in Christ – provide for them when they are without, to help them.

By the way, there's an interesting passage in Luke 3. A crowd comes to John the Baptist and says, "What are the expressions of repentance?" And he gives them a list of things, but this is one of them. Luke 3:11. "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none..." In James chapter 2, James says if a brother or sister is without clothing, give it to him. Whatever you do, don't say, "Be warmed. Go in peace." Meet that need. You and I are responsible and this is one of the ways God cares for the clothing needs of the people around us, is when we see a need and we meet it if they are in need.

Let me just encourage you to be alert to the needs around you. Let me give you another specific challenge. Go home today, look in your closet, and look for the things that you haven't worn in several years and give them to some organization where somebody who can benefit from them will use them. Don't hoard things that you don't use. This is a way you can live out this reality.

There's a third way that God provides clothing and that is on rare occasions, God intervenes directly and He provides in unusual or even sometimes miraculous ways. Now don't get me wrong. I don't think this happens all the time. In fact, it may never happen in my lifetime. It may never happen in your lifetime. But from time to time, God does it. My favorite example is Deuteronomy 8 where He talks about the children of Israel in the wilderness. And for forty years, He kept their shoes from wearing out and their clothes from wearing out. Mine wear out a lot sooner than that, and yours do too. God intervened because there was no way for two million people to get clothes and shoes in the wilderness. And God can do that if He chooses. He can intervene in unusual and even miraculous ways.

So Jesus reminds us that the same God who clothes all of creation, including wildflowers, will also clothe us. William Hendriksen writes, “If God provides the short-lived grass, He will surely provide for His children destined for eternal glory. If God decks the wildflowers with such beautiful garments, then He will certainly clothe His children with the ordinary garments they need.”

Jesus ends verse 30 by identifying the real problem with worry. Notice how He ends. “You of little faith!” Here is Jesus’ diagnosis of the real issue behind worry. Anytime you worry, anytime I worry, the real issue is that we don’t have sufficient confidence and trust in God. That’s what He’s saying. You don’t have sufficient confidence in God’s clear promises to you. He said He would care for you. He said He would meet those needs. It honors Him when we believe that He will do so. Jesus says to each of us as His disciples, “Your Father will provide for the basic necessities of your life, including even the clothes that you need to wear.” Do you believe that?

Here’s the really good news. Our God not only provides for the physical clothes we need, but in Christ our God has provided the spiritual clothes we need. If you’re in Christ, you sit here this morning and you are clothed in Biblical terms in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. God doesn’t see you in all of your sin. He doesn’t see you for the person you are. He sees you for the person that Christ is. He sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He’s clothed you in His perfect righteousness. That’s what we celebrate in the Lord’s Table.

Our Father, we thank You for the cup. We thank You for the fact that our Lord poured out His lifeblood to purchase our forgiveness – that He became the sacrifice, Your Lamb, offered for the sin of the world. But Father, we thank You that You have applied that to us. For those of us whom You have chosen in eternity past and set Your love upon, You have made this truth our own. Lord, we were Your enemies. We were rebels against Your will and You, by Your Spirit, gave us life. We celebrate that even in the Lord’s Table – that through His death we live, that You exchanged His precious, perfect life in the place of our wicked, sinful one so that we could wear His righteousness. We thank You, O God. Help us to live as those who’ve been redeemed.

And Father, help us to trust You with all of life here. Help us to seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness, knowing that everything else that we need You will add to us.

Father, I pray for the person here this morning who has never experienced true forgiveness for sin, who is still a rebel against You and Your will. Lord, may this be the day when You call them to Yourself through the good news of the gospel. May they turn to Christ even today. We pray in His great name. Amen.