

The background features a dark blue-grey color palette with various technical and scientific motifs. On the left side, there is a large, semi-circular scale with numerical markings from 140 to 260 in increments of 10. Several circular diagrams with arrows and dashed lines are scattered across the page, suggesting a theme of measurement, engineering, or scientific study. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

PART 5 – WHAT GOD THINKS OF MY AMBITIONS

MATTHEW 6: 19-34

BASED ON JOHN STOTT'S '12 STUDIES FOR INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS'

INTRODUCTION

- Everyone is ambitious to be or to do something: childhood ambitions tend to follow certain stereotypes – to be an athlete, astronaut or movie star!
- Adults have their own narrow stereotypes too – to be wealthy, famous or powerful!
- GROUP DISCUSSION – share your childhood dreams. What did you want to be when you grew up? Why and how did this ambition change?
- PERSONAL REFLECTION (share if you want) – what power has the spell of materialism held over you? How has it been hard to break?
- Does Christian faith make a difference as you set your ambitions? In this passage Jesus helps us to choose well. He points out the folly of the wrong way and the wisdom of the right. Then he invites us to compare them and to decide for ourselves!



MATTHEW 6: 19-34 (ESV)

- “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
- “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!
- “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.




1. WHAT ACCORDING TO JESUS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS IN LIFE?

ESV Bible Notes

The righteousness of the Kingdom of Heaven works out in the details of one's personal life.

Jesus calls his followers to choose their master, either God or wealth and to choose their outlook on life, either faith or worry.

Group view – seek 1st the Kingdom of God, and everything else will be added to you!



2. WHY SHOULD WE STORE UP HEAVENLY TREASURES RATHER THAN EARTHLY ONES?


- Does this mean that we cannot have personal property, savings accounts or insurance policies? NO!
- What Jesus forbids his followers is the selfish accumulation of goods:
 - Extravagant and luxurious living
 - The hard-heartedness that does not feel the colossal need of the world's underprivileged people
 - The foolish fantasy that a person's life consists in the abundance of his or her possessions
 - And the materialism that tethers our hearts to the earth
- To store up treasure *on earth* does not mean being provident (making sensible decisions for your future security) but being covetous and always wanting more.
- This is the real snare of which Jesus warns here.



3. PRACTICALLY SPEAKING, HOW CAN WE STORE UP TREASURE IN HEAVEN?

- What are TREASURES IN HEAVEN?
- Jesus does not explain it.
- But surely, we may say that to ‘store up treasure in heaven’ is to do anything on earth whose effects last forever, or at least for a long time – to do those things that are PLEASING TO GOD.
- Can we think of any EXAMPLES?

ESV Bible Notes – people often have a choice between those activities that lead to greater earthly reward in the present and those that store up greater future reward in heaven. Elsewhere in the gospels the consequences of making the wrong choice are shown to be eternally disastrous (Mark 8:36 / Luke 12:20-21)



4. HOW ARE PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL SIGHT (OR BLINDNESS) SIMILAR?

- In scripture, the EYE is often equivalent to the HEART
- That is to set the heart and to fix the eye on something are the same thing!
- Jesus's argument seems to go like this:
 - Just as our eye affects our whole body, so our ambitions – where we fix our eyes and heart – affects our whole life!

ESV Bible Notes

The eye is a lamp that reveals the quality of a person's inner life. A healthy eye / clear vision suggests loyal devotion to God, but a bad eye / impaired vision connotes moral corruption.

5. WHY DOES JESUS SAY THAT IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO SERVE TWO MASTERS?

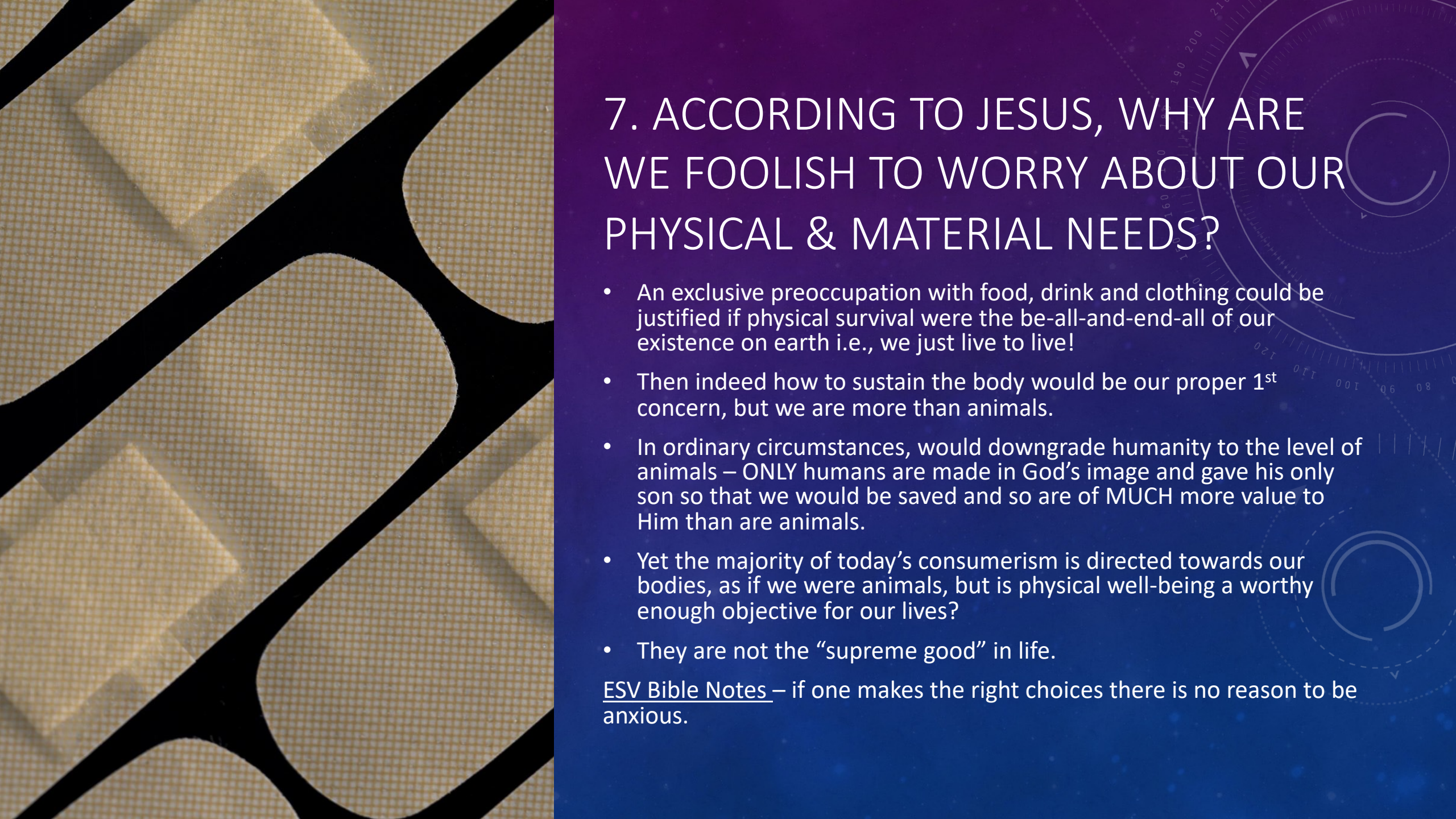
- A supervisor usually only places limited demands on the employee e.g., to work a certain number of hours per week.
- Thus, a person could satisfy two bosses if the hours required by each do not conflict.
- But Jesus is referring to slave-owners who own ALL of a slave – therefore it is impossible to be owned completely by two masters.

ESV Bible Notes

The Greek word to Serve is Douleuo and indicates the work of a slave, not an employee. Since a slave is the sole property of one master, he must give the master exclusive service. A disciple's loyalty cannot be divided – that is, one is either a slave to God or to money.

6. HOW WILL THE CRUCIAL CHOICES THAT WE MAKE AFFECT OUR ABILITY TO LIVE FREE FROM WORRY?


- It is a pity that this passage is often read on its own, isolated from what has gone before.
- Then the significance of the introductory phrase, ‘Therefore, I tell you ...’ in verse 25, is missed.
- So, we must relate this ‘therefore’, this conclusion of Jesus, to the teaching that has led up to it!
- He calls us to thought before he calls us to action!
- He invites us to look clearly and coolly at the alternatives before us and to weigh them carefully.
- Only when we have grasped the comparative durability of the two treasures, the comparative usefulness of the two eye conditions and the comparative worth of the two masters, are we ready to consider Jesus’s words.
- Therefore, I tell you, this is how you must go on to behave.



7. ACCORDING TO JESUS, WHY ARE WE FOOLISH TO WORRY ABOUT OUR PHYSICAL & MATERIAL NEEDS?

- An exclusive preoccupation with food, drink and clothing could be justified if physical survival were the be-all-and-end-all of our existence on earth i.e., we just live to live!
- Then indeed how to sustain the body would be our proper 1st concern, but we are more than animals.
- In ordinary circumstances, would downgrade humanity to the level of animals – ONLY humans are made in God's image and gave his only son so that we would be saved and so are of MUCH more value to Him than are animals.
- Yet the majority of today's consumerism is directed towards our bodies, as if we were animals, but is physical well-being a worthy enough objective for our lives?
- They are not the "supreme good" in life.


ESV Bible Notes – if one makes the right choices there is no reason to be anxious.



8. HOW DOES WORRY ALSO REVEAL A LACK OF FAITH?


- The Lord promises that our heavenly father can be trusted to provide all that we need.
- BUT we are not exempt from earning a living (see 2 Thess. 3:10)
- NOR from having responsibility for others
- AND we are not exempt from experiencing trouble - Freedom from worry and freedom from trouble are NOT the same thing.
- God's children are promised only freedom from Worry.

ESV Bible Notes – v.30 – Grass was a common source of fuel for fire and is used as a metaphor for human frailty (see Ps. 37:2, 102:4), whilst 'little' faith implies a deficiency rather than a lack of faith.




11. WHY AND HOW ARE OUR AMBITIONS AS A CHRISTIAN TO BE DIFFERENT?

- Ambitions for SELF may be quite modest
 - Enough to eat, enough to drink, clothes to wear etc.
- OR they may be grandiose
 - Bigger/faster car, big house, higher salary etc.
- But whether modest or immodest these are ambitions for SELF – my comfort, my wealth, my status, my power etc.
- Ambitions for God, however, if they are worthy can NEVER be modest! There is something inherently inappropriate about cherishing small ambitions for God.
- Once we are clear that God is King, we must long to see Him crowned with Glory and Honour, so must become ambitious for the spread of the Kingdom and righteousness everywhere.



12. HOW HAS THIS PASSAGE CHALLENGED YOU TO RE-EXAMINE YOUR GOALS AND AMBITIONS?

- What are “goals and ambitions”?
- It is a very “Western” concept and for many people around the world, their “goal” may be to stay exactly as they are!
- Our goal as a church may be “to grow closer to God and to one another”!
- Being anxious about Church ambitions to further the gospel are not God-inspired and limit God



BIBLE STUDY
NOTES:
FROM
MEETING ON
19TH APRIL
2023

- Worry is a human condition! Asking us not to worry is a high standard.
- Christian faith can make you content
- Christ gives you peace when times are tough
- Even when we go through hardships we can grow in faith
- For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also!
- “moth” and “rust” are interesting ways to describe decay – affects things that are made by man i.e., clothing and implements
- People are often searching for their “identity” and see that in the accumulation of earthly things
- “I want more!” has become the way
- A constant search for things that don’t fulfil
- Money is too easily available today – not “rich towards God”
- Be content with what we have – see Philippians Ch.4
- Treasures in heaven are borne of Love, based on prayer and come from doing those things that are pleasing to God
- What’s the point of gaining the whole world but losing your soul?
- Need to see the good in others, not the bad
- Message Bible has a very different translation of v.34
- Also, can’t serve two “Gods”, not masters!
- Look up! To God.
- Not down, to man (and Satan, who wants us to worry)
- Worry is destructive – it makes us doubt God! It hampers us.