

LESSON 1 • JUNE 6, 2021

MOSES: PROPHET OF DELIVERANCE

Lesson Scripture: Exodus 12:28-50; Deuteronomy 18:15-22

Focus Scripture: Deuteronomy 18:15-22

Key Verse: *The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet."*

Deuteronomy 18:15 (NRSV)

MATTHEW 6:25-34 (NRSV) (NRSV)

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

26 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?

27 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

28 And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,

29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more

clothe you—you of little faith?

31 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'

32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

33 But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

34 So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

DEUTERONOMY 18:15-22 (KJV)

25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more

clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

INTRODUCTION

The lessons in this quarter (June–August 2021) look at God’s gift of faith as the source of hope. All the lessons are rooted in the Gospels and Epistles. Those from the Gospels highlight the hope and faith that shines through in the teachings and miracles of Jesus, while lessons based on the Epistles show how the early church understood God’s gift of salvation through faith in Christ as the source of hope.

As usual, we divided the lessons into three groups. In the first five lessons, group one, we show the importance of Jesus’ teachings and miracles in the Gospel stories. There is a good reason for this. In the Hebrew scriptures, we find events that connect salvation to belief in God. However, it is in the Gospels that the concept of salvation by law and works is replaced by grace through faith.

The first lesson spotlights Jesus’ teaching on worry. In a sense,

worry (anxiety) is a natural response to the uncertainties of the future. It exposes our concerns to avoid pain, loss, and embarrassment. If by some magic, we could find certainty that in the future, we would have all the money, food, clothes, housing, and medical care we desire then we would not worry. Since life offers no such guarantees, we worry. In the background text, Jesus exposed the roots of our worries. Then he gave sound advice on what we must do to break the habits of anxiety.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The background scripture is most appreciated when read in the context of Matthew chapter six. Jesus was addressing certain religious traditions of Jews and he opened the conversation to include the motivation behind religious practices. He specified charitable giving, praying, fasting, attitudes about personal wealth, and loyalty to God.

Jesus was calling his disciples away from shallow public performances designed to gain public applause. He urged them to look behind the intent or motivation for their traditions. At this point the background scriptures kick in. They are a part of the wider discussion of what is acceptable to God. Please keep this context in mind as you examine Jesus' teaching on worry. The habit of worrying does not please God; it cannot. Anxiety exposes our confusion or doubt on at least four important issues. And such doubt is offensive to God.

First, Jesus linked worry to greed and our desire to feel secure and

comfortable about life on earth. Such greed has the danger of leading us to place greater value on life on earth as we ignore or minimize the value of eternal life. The greater the importance we place on material belongings, the greater is our worry relating to them. The remedy here is to keep everything in true perspective. This advice is grounded in the idea of giving to earthly matters the concern those matters deserve, and to heavenly matters the higher value eternal matters deserve.

Second, worrying shows our ignorance of divine providence. There is a definite order to life in the universe. And in that order, God made provisions for even the birds and lilies to get the necessities of life. Humans, as God's crowning creation, are much more valuable than birds and plants. Therefore, we can feel confident that the same God who feeds and clothes birds and lilies will so much more provide food, clothing, and protection for us. Third, when we worry, we act like heathens: i.e., people who do not have or know their God. Our knowledge of God, the divine nature, God's unconditional love for us, and faithfulness throughout history should instantly shift us from worrying to praising.

In this regard, please consider a footnote. Jesus' advice for us to see how God provides for the birds and the lilies is not a command for us to live like birds and lilies. Scriptures like 2 Thessalonians 3:10 are clear that we are to make the required effort to provide for ourselves and our families the necessities of life. Last, Jesus gave the most powerful reason why humans should not worry. We achieve

nothing useful by worrying. All of Jesus' teaching on worry still hold today. We should embrace it.

SANKOFA

One of the biggest worries of African American families is falling victim to racism. For many black families, responding to the issue of racism is a daily reality.

On August 23, 2019, the BBC News carried a story of one such terrified black man. After a horrifying experience, which he believed was racially motivated, Obadele Kambon relocated to Ghana in 2008; he never looked back. In fact, he vowed never to return to the USA.

Since moving to Ghana, Dr. Kambon reported that in Ghana, he enjoyed freedoms he was denied in the USA, the land of his birth. He built a satisfying life in Ghana for him and his family. Dr. Kambon told the BBC that he no longer looks over his shoulder in Ghana in fear of being pulled over by police. He no longer worries about his son being shot by police officers, as was the case with 12-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio in 2014. Dr. Kambon himself knew what it was like to face unjustified police arrest and charges. In 2007, he was arrested and placed before the courts on a firearm's charge. That experience cemented his decision to leave the USA.

In African countries like Ghana, people may have other worries, but fears associated with racism are not among their major concerns.

CASE STUDY

In the preceding section, we mentioned one of the significant worries of African American families. Here we consider another: the alarming disparity of wealth between white and non-white populations. As with racial discrimination in the judicial system, the economic gap in the USA is often misunderstood. People who are not at risk of being victims of the system cannot comprehend this issue's depth.

A study in 2015 shined some light on this concern. The study's results were published under the heading, "The Color of Wealth in Boston." It was a joint project of Duke University, The New School, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.

Some of the findings were:

1. Concerning liquid assets, only 7% of whites had no saving or checking bank accounts. For blacks in the USA, the percentage was over three times higher (25%).
2. Homes: almost 80% of white families in the study owned homes. For African Americans, it was 33%.
3. Retirement accounts: for whites, 56% and for blacks, it's 20%.
4. Debt burden: the most frequent and significant debt for blacks is mortgage debt, whereas for whites it is student loans and medical expenses. (This has serious implications for employment opportunities and the quality of health care services available to people in the respective groups.)
5. Net worth. For this we quote directly from the publication. "While white households have a median wealth of \$247,500, Dominicans and U.S. blacks have a median wealth of close to

zero.”

Let us put these disclosures in the context of Jesus’ teaching on worry. African Americans must have the right attitude and values for material wealth. In our lives, material wealth must never become a substitute for the real wealth of inner peace and access to eternal life. However, to the extent we see such wealth as needed for our advancement, we must take decisive actions to improve the situation. Merely worrying or complaining about the disparities will not add one more penny to our net worth. Worrying cannot replace the need for wise and sustained actions. These include setting realistic goals, making both short-term and long-term plans, using resources wisely, taking advantage of available opportunities, and building better relationships in our communities.

LIFE APPLICATION

Christians grow in their faith. At any point in time we will encounter mature Christians and we will encounter those who are still in the early stage of maturity. Other things being equal, mature Christians have a better perspective on life. So, they tend to worry less than their immature brothers and sisters.

All Christians must aim to embrace Christ’s teaching on worry. But at the same time, we must recognize that it may take years before some people attain the level of worry-free living. Therefore, we must be patient with ourselves and others who have not reached the standards set by Christ. Often it is enough to be moving towards the goal.

Dealing with worry can be tricky. A frontal attack on worry is prone to failure. The best way to reduce our level of worry is to increase trust in God. The more we trust in God's almighty power to take care of us, the less we will worry. Therefore, take time to reflect on how God provided and cared for you in the past. Use past experiences as a springboard to trust God in the present and the future. Frequently think about those times when you needed solutions to complex problems and God came to your rescue. It is an accepted fact that worry and praise cannot coexist in the same house. Make it a habit to praise God for past favors.

Finally, remember the link Jesus made between worry and greed. Wealth must never become the central focus in a believer's life. Let the birds and flowers you see remind you of God's commitment to provide for you the necessary things for life. The hope and joy we associate with eternal life are enough to kill desires for material abundance on earth. The more we bring our fleshly desires under control, the less will be our worries.

Questions:

1. What strategies can or do you use to deal with worry and anxieties?
2. If for many persons of African descent one of the biggest worries is racial discrimination, how can this source of worry be addressed by faith?
3. Thinking about the things that cause you to worry, how will you strive to find ways to trust God concerning these?

CLOSING DEVOTION

Closing Song: "His Eye Is on the Sparrow," AMEC Hymn #435

Closing Prayer: Lord God almighty, I thank you that your caring and providing eyes are always on me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

May 31–June 6

Monday 1 Samuel 9:5-10 (Worried? Seek God's Counsel)

Tuesday Ezekiel 34:11-16 (God Cares for His People)

Wednesday 1 Timothy 6:17-19 (Rich? Set Your Hope on God)

Thursday Matthew 17:14-20 (Enlarge Your Faith Practices)

Friday Luke 12:22-34 (Overcome Worry Through Faith)

Saturday Matthew 6:19-24 (Serve God with Your Whole Heart)

Sunday Matthew 6:25-34 (Live Worry Free Every Day)