

Hakuna Matata

A Prep Guide for Session Five of a Scholarly Stroll

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Sepphoris Stocks Slump Business Section

(Capernaum, Galilee) There is concern in the financial sector of Galilee today, as a popular village rabbi persuades large crowds not to worry about material goods. After Jesus of Nazareth told the masses not to trouble themselves about their food and clothing, related industries also lost ground with investors. Pharaoh's Phine Phoods of Egypt, was down 50 points; Fig corporation, a main supplier of hand-held cash-counting devices, lost 43; and Purple Toga, a fine clothing merchandiser plummeted 57 points – all on the Sepphoris Exchange. Banks were hardest hit, with investors suspecting security breaches. Some took Jesus literally when he exhorted his charges not to “store up treasure on earth, where moths can destroy and thieves can break in and steal.” The one bright spot in the market was an unexpected gain by local travel agencies, as this crowd grows and people journey from near and far..

An Overview

As we move to session five and the second half of our “scholarly stroll”, it's time to pull back and look at the flow of the Sermon. The tone and mood of Matthew 5 undulates from the initial blessings (beatitudes) Jesus pronounces on these weary but awakened fisherman and tax collectors (5.1 -17), to the exacting pursuit of the perfection of Torah (5.18 -48), through a call to utter authenticity in relationship to God (6.1-18), and now on to a very pastoral call to low-anxiety living in 6.19 -34. In our next three weeks, Jesus will further impart a path to nonjudgmental but apt discernment in day to day living (7.1 -6), prayerful trust in a good parent (7.7 -11), carefully discerning (judging?) truth from falsehood in the voices that surround (7.15 -20), authentic faith amid false claims to it (7.21 -23), and choosing the road rarely taken that is golden rule living (7.12 -14). In a brief final parable, he will commend his teaching to all who will listen as the solid rock on which to build a life. (7.24 -29)

The Hinge

Matthew 6.19-21 belongs both to what precedes it and what ensues from it. In his teaching on integrity in Matthew 6.1 -18, Jesus speaks three times of the advantage that awaits the humble alms-giver, prayer, and fast observer. Throughout that section, Jesus has juxtaposed those who seek the ephemeral reward of human admiration, on the one hand, to those who eschew such a fleeting recognition in favor of quiet piety. The God who sees this latter form of humble integrity done in

secret “will reward you”. These rewards seem to be in view as Jesus speaks in our 19th verse.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Looking backward to the teaching on hypocrisy, the treasure to be sought is the presence and approval of the God who sees in secret.

If 6:19-21 cap the first half of the chapter, though, they also anticipate parts of the second half. As [one commentator](#) has put it, “6:19 –21 serves a double-duty role as the climactic conclusion to 6:1 –21 and as the introduction to the following unit, 6:19 – 34. The link centers on the overlapping ideas of treasure, reward, and money.” And so we turn our heads toward Jesus’s famous treatment of money. But the words that immediately follow the hinge don’t immediately seem to have anything to do with finances. Let’s check them out.

God and Money

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy [literally “good”], your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy [literally “bad”], your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”

“G-O-O-D-E-Y-E, Good eye! Good Eye! Good Eye!” So goes the enthusiastic chant from Little League baseball team benches across the English speaking world. In that context, “Good eye!” means, “Hooray that you didn’t swing at a pitch outside the strike zone!”

On the other hand, “good eye” in an optometrist office is the one of two eyes in which a patient has better vision.

In Matthew 6:22 - 23, we run head on into one of the challenges of reading the Bible in English. “Good eye” and “bad eye” would be literal translations, but they miss by a mile the connotation of the Hebrew phrase “TOV ‘AYIN”. In the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and in other sources in ancient Judaism, “TOV ‘AYIN” has a specific meaning in context. In the New International Version of Proverbs 22:9, we read,

“The generous will themselves be blessed / for they share their food with the poor.”

Which of us would have guessed from this translation that the Hebrew behind the English word “generous” is “TOV ‘AYIN”. Having a good eye in ancient Judaism has

little to do with watching a ball go by or spotting more letters on an optometrist's chart. Instead, it means having a spirit of generosity.

As you might guess, the opposite is true, too. RA' 'AYIN is literally "bad eye", but idiomatically "selfish" or "miserly", as in Proverbs 23.6 -7:

*Do not eat the food of a begrudging host, do not crave his delicacies;
for he is the kind of person who is always thinking about the cost.*

The passage ends up having everything to do with money and possessions. It turns out that "the good eye" and "the bad eye" (TOV 'AYIN and RA' 'AYIN) are Ebenezer Scrooge before and after the ghosts visit him.

This backdrop also makes sense of Matthew 6.24. If flourish arises from generosity rather than stinginess, money also presents each of us with a stark either/or between God and what the King James Version translates "mammon".

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Matthew 6.24)

While the meaning of Jesus's "two masters" saying is hardly puzzling, once again here, an adage from ancient Judaism comes into focus. Ancient rabbinic sayings include two parallels:

"we have not found that any one is fit for two tables." (*Praefat. Celi Jaker*, fol. 3. 1.)

"that it is not proper for one person to have two governments:" (*Piske Tosephot Cetubot*, art. 359.)

To paraphrase, then, if you are generous, your whole self is filled with light; but if you're miserly, your whole self is filled with darkness. So, use your good eye to make a good decision: choose God over money.

Jesus, Bob Marley, and Bobby McFerrin Walk into the Lion King

"Don't worry about a thing, 'cause every little thing is gonna be alright." Not many people who have lived in an English speaking country during the last five decades can refrain from dancing a little when Bob Marley's classic lyrics burst from a speaker near them.

The same is true on a smaller scale for those who hear Bobby McFerrin sing out "the little song he wrote", "Don't worry, be happy". And if you haven't been caught by either these songs, maybe Timon and Pumba, the meerkat and warthog from Disney's "The Lion King" have snagged you with their catchy "Hakuna Matata". After

all, “It means no worries for the rest of your days.” and “It’s a problem -free philosophy.”

These contemporary lyrics vibe with Jesus’s next words in the Sermon.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. (Matthew 6.26 -29)

The difference between Jesus’s familiar call and our pop -cultural parallels comes to light when we look for the grounds of the assurance. Bob Marley, Bobby McFerrin, and the Lion King lyricist Tim Rice all summon us to a sort of folk wisdom that gets us nowhere. Jesus, on the other hand, offers a divine source for our provision. Just as God – interestingly, also their heavenly Father – feeds the birds and clothes the flowers, so Jesus’s followers can rely on divine supply for their own needs.

“Don’t worry!” doesn’t quite comprehend the invitation of Jesus. Instead, he is calling on his disciples to faith and trust God, and so positioning “the bad eye” or miserliness as a failure of that faith and trust.

Again here, as in his teaching on prayer earlier in chapter 6, Jesus offers the Gentiles as a negative comparative. In 6.7, Gentiles thought the gods would hear them more easily if they spoke long and wordy prayers. This time, the Gentiles are the ones who worry and fret about material things. “the Gentiles/pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.” (6.32)

Occasionally in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus calls his disciples a name. “Oh, you little -faiths” appears in 8.23 -27 when Jesus stills a storm, and in 14.23 -33 when he walks on water. Jesus also calls them little -faiths when they can’t quite grasp his teaching to the Pharisees and Sadducees. (16.8). So why does Jesus call the disciples “little -faiths” in this context of worry and money? (6.30)

As we noticed above, the picture of an anxiety -free life here is different than the ones in the pop songs. Running after money or clenching one’s hands around it or worrying about not having enough for food and clothes – Jesus pictures all of these as failures of trust. To him, this sort of worry is a sign of distrust and a failure of faith.

Ordered

Do you picture Jesus organized? If you yourself are organized, you probably do. If not, you see him as a creative, artsy sort who might leave his socks on the floor and come to meetings late. None of this captures the kind of order to which Jesus calls us in Matthew 6.19 - 34. There, he lets us in on the secret that we naturally order our lives by our loves – that our hearts go where our treasure is.

His prime candidate for our misplaced affection is stuff – money and the things money can buy. We worry because we don't have more, we spend our days chasing something that's vulnerable to damage or disappearance. Jesus cautions us about our tendency and then offers an alternative: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6.33)

This alternative probably should have been available to us without Jesus' help. After all, look at flowers and birds. They don't worry and toil, but they're beautiful. Maybe that's why my labradoodle Watson always rolls his eyes at me when I have to find and put on pants and shirt and shoes just to take him for a walk. He's always ready. It takes me time. Jesus uses the simple lives of animals and plants as a parable to teach us simplicity. Creation doesn't worry, so why should we?

This image of learning naturally from creation is beautiful, but the choice is certainly not so easy. In fact, Jesus pictures a veritable turf war over us between money and God. "You can't serve both!" Or as Bob Dylan put it, "You can serve the devil, or you can serve the Lord, but you gotta serve somebody." The stakes are high and both sides are strong.

Some of you will recall Plato's Allegory of the Charioteer. The chariot driver has two horses. A bright white one naturally ascends to the spirit world, while a jet-black horse naturally dives toward the physical and detrimental. It's his job to steer the black horse upward on the path of the white horse, toward the most important things. It's Plato's commentary on the competing voices in us. But one very vivid image tells of the toil: the successful rerouting happens only with blood on the black horse's bit. Our carnal self doesn't give up easily! Or as Frederick Buechner once put it: "I know Old Adam and Old Eve are supposed to be drowned in the waters of baptism, but those two are awfully good swimmers."

"Seek first..." says Jesus. Put your loves in proper order. In his book, *The Road to Character*, columnist David Brooks borrowed a sixteen-century-old image from St. Augustine to describe sin as "disordered loves." Brooks explains: "We all love a lot of things. We love family, we love money, we love a little affection, status, truth," Brooks says. "And we all know that some loves are higher. We know that our love of family is higher than our love of money... Our love of truth should be higher than our love of money. [But] if we're lying to get money, we're putting our loves out of order."

Resources

We'll pick all this up on Monday evening. If you wish to read more widely, the resources below are worth your time.

Jonathan Pennington, [*The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*](#) .

This is a full-length online book that will cost you a few bucks. I find the thesis helpful. The author offers a viable explanation of the rational organization of the sermon.

The Bible Project, ["What Matthew 6:22 -23 \(The Eye Is the Lamp of the Body\) Means – Exploring Jesus' Metaphor for Our Relationship to Wealth"](#) ,

This is a quick, very accessible article on TOV 'AYIN and RA' 'AYIN, the good eye and the bad eye.

Emerson Powery, [The Working Preacher's Commentary on Matthew 6.24 -34.](#)

The Working Preacher is a useful source, not only for pulpiteers but also for curious Bible readers. This article is a quick and capable walk through the latter half of this session's passage.

Our Class Reading Schedule

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| 05JAN26 | Blessed | Matthew 5.1 - 16 |
| 12JAN26 | Deepening Torah | Matthew 5.17 - 30 |
| 19JAN26 | Chasing Perfection | Matthew 5.31 - 48 |
| 26JAN26 | Building Integrity | Matthew 6.1 - 18 |
| 02FEB26 | Non-Anxious Presents | Matthew 6.19 - 34 |
| 09FEB26 | The Gold Standard | Matthew 7.1 - 11 |
| 16FEB26 | Discerning the Voices | Matthew 7.12 - 23 |
| 23FEB26 | Solid Ground | Matthew 7.24 - 29 |