

Psyched Out

Matthew 6:25-34

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“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall 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 one cubit 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 men 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 all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day.”

Well, that’s really encouraging . . . at first. You think, “Oh great – I can just kick back and blow stuff off. I don’t have to work!” Yet I’m still supposed to pick up a cross and follow.

At first its encouraging,
but then you start worrying . . . about worrying.

At first its encouraging,
but then you watch Animal Planet.

“Consider the birds . . .”? Jesus, many species don’t live too long and work really hard, and many that *do* live long suffer quite a bit. “Consider the birds . . .”?

I immediately thought of the woodpecker I shot with a BB gun when I was a kid. I considered it (stared at it . . . it’s tongue was hanging out) . . . it really made me anxious.

“Consider the lilies of the field . . . ” Okay, I just stepped on one. And did you notice deer eat the lilies of the field?

Then it gets worse. It appears that Jesus *does* notice. He even says it:

“Consider the grass, so beautifully clothed . . . before it’s throw into the oven and burned! Therefore don’t be anxious.” Gosh Jesus, I don’t want to be burned!

It kind of stresses me out.

If I were a bird, some grass, or a flower, I’d be so stressed out about dying that I doubt I could do any living. To live in this world, to live in time, is to constantly die. Every moment we die to the last moment.

Jesus says, “Don’t be anxious about your life, what you will eat, drink, and wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”

You know, for almost all of human history, that was a rhetorical question. Folks would laugh and say, “Of *course* life is more than food!” For the first time, in the twentieth century, a significant portion of humanity began to say, “Well, actually, modern science has shown that life *isn't* any more than food. Actually, Jesus, we now understand that the only real things are things you can touch, feel, and measure with our advanced, scientific instruments in a controlled environment.”

That view is called Empiricism or Materialism. It's a corruption of science. In that view, birds exist not because of a loving Creator but because of a violent, desperate struggle not to die. Life is explained by death.

In the twentieth century, Materialism gave birth to the Third Reich and Communism. Theology was replaced by psychology. Theology has to do with powers beyond our control, powers that cannot be reduced and studied in a lab, and thus it has to do with powers that don't exist.

In the twentieth century, if you really had a problem, you wouldn't go to a theologian but a psychologist or psychiatrist.

In the twentieth century, pastors stopped studying theology and began studying psychology. That's an oversimplification, but maybe not as much as you think.

Someone said, “Modern man has so many psychological problems because they're the only kind of problems he's allowed to have.”

Now, pre-modern man didn't deny psychiatry and the chemical functioning of the brain. (Every one of them knew that a couple

pints of beer could change your psychic state.) Jesus knew that. He just believed there was much more than that.

A Communist textbook defined kiss in the following way: “A kiss is the approach of two pairs of lips, with reciprocal transmission of microbes and carbon dioxide.” It’s not that that’s not true, but perhaps there’s *more* to a kiss. Perhaps a kiss hides treasure. Perhaps life is more than food or drink.

Freud considered life and “the lilies”—the grass. He saw that “all flesh is like grass and its glory like the flower of the grass. The grass withers and the flower falls.” That’s Isaiah 40. Jesus knew that verse when he said, “Consider the lilies.”

Well, Freud considered and concluded that we’re all secretly motivated by a repressed fear of death, and I think he’s right. Maybe abnormal psychology is just abnormal repression . . . and normal psychology is just socially acceptable repression. What’s a psychologist or one of those state-funded grief counselors supposed to say?

“I understand your grief cycle and the function of dopamine in your brain. Hope that helps.”

“Thanks, doc. But *we’re still gonna die!*”

“Repress that thought! . . . or you won’t be able to live.”

W. H. Auden labeled the twentieth century the Age of Anxiety. And Jesus says, “Don’t be anxious about your life.”

Several Greek words get translated as the English word “life.”

- “Bios” is one from which we get biology.
- “Zoe” is one from which we get zoology.

- “Psyche” is one from which we get psychology. “Psyche” also gets translated as soul or mind or being.

Jesus says, “Is not your psyche more than food?” “Don’t be anxious about your psyche (life).” “Stop taking your psyche so seriously!” What kind of psychologist would Jesus make?

“My goodness, you really *are* depressed. Well, stop taking your depression so seriously. You need to die, and I’ll help you. This here is a cross; the nails go here and here.”

We want to yell, “Stop it, Jesus! You could do severe psychic damage!” Perhaps He’d say, “Yes . . . I’m aiming for *total* psychic damage. To quote myself in Matthew 16:25, ‘Whoever would save his psyche will lose it, but whoever would lose his psyche for my sake will find it.’”

OK, right. Then let’s talk theology rather than psychology.

Jesus asks:

“Why do we worry about life?”
Because long ago in a garden we lost it.

“Why do we worry about food?”
Because long ago in a garden we ate some bad food, and the day we ate it, we died.

“Why do we worry about clothes and fashion?” (That is a mystery psychologically.)
Because theologically, long ago in a garden we ate and died and lost our glory and tried to hide in shame. So we wear clothes.

Long ago in a garden we trusted a snake and traded the person who is good for the knowledge of the good. We wanted our own logos more than God's Logos. We wanted our own meaning more than God's Meaning. We wanted our psyche-logos more than the Theo-Logos—the God Word—the Word of God—Jesus.

Long ago in a garden we got *psyched out*, worrying, “Is God really good?” We got psyched out of life, heaven, and the great dance.

Maybe our anxieties are so strong and our addictions so powerful because they're . . .

. . . not really about food but *heavenly* food,
 . . . not really about drink but *heavenly* wine,
 . . . not really about clothes or fashion but *glory*
 that lasts forever and doesn't fade.

Maybe we really are motivated by and in bondage to a repressed fear of death . . . so scared we can barely live.

Perhaps our anxieties are so strong and our addictions are so powerful because we're trying to get back to a garden. We're trying to find a kingdom—an eternal kingdom, but the kingdom is not of this world.

Jesus came preaching, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” He has just said, “Store up treasure for yourselves in heaven.” Now we read verse 25: “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life (psyche) . . .” (We forgot to ask what the “therefore” is there for. It's there because of last week's sermon.)

Last week we postulated that all our reality is like the Highlights Hidden Picture picture page [Exhibit A]. It really

doesn't matter what the picture is on the page . . . a Teddy Bear Factory, kids in a yard, someone sick or in prison, the last and the least of these. What matters is that it hides treasure. There's a key on the side of the page that tells you what the treasure is. At first you can't see the treasure in the picture, because it's a part of this other pattern, this other paradigm. You could call this picture or your initial perception of this picture your *psyche*.

When you lose your psyche (like, by turning the page upside down), other meanings appear. They were there all along but just hidden by your psyche.

If you just have your psyche and no key, the picture gets boring and depressing, and you might become addicted to it, that is, desperately trying to suck meaning out of meaningless things. But if someone shows you the key (the meaning), then you can lose the picture and find treasure in the picture. Here is the great irony: Although you lose the old picture, you receive it back with new meaning. The food is better, the wine is better, the clothes are better . . . because they're all about something else. And you can love them without becoming addicted. You've "lost your psyche and found it with new meaning."

We postulated that all reality is like a Highlights Hidden Picture picture. God and His kingdom is the treasure, and our hearts are the treasury. Jesus Christ and Him crucified is the key. That is, this cross is the shape on the side of the picture which gives meaning to all things [Exhibit B]. Jesus is the light, the Revelation of God. When the eyes of our heart are clear, He shines into our hearts, gives us the kingdom, and treasure is stored in heaven—heavenly treasure that does not rot or die.

Well, I'd like to take last week's sermon and apply time. Then your life, your psyche, is a string of Highlights Hidden Picture pictures—a *movie*. Every picture, every frame, changes

constantly, yet the key—the light that illumines the picture—is always the same.

Jesus is the light that enlightens every picture.
 (“For this is the plan for the fulness of time,
 to unite all things in Him.”)

The psyche changes, but the light remains the same. It’s just like Einstein said, “Time and even matter are relative to light.” Light is the constant, and Jesus said, “I AM . . . the light.” Paul writes, “Whatever is exposed to light becomes visible and is itself light.”

The Light turns ordinary things into eternal treasures.

That is, in every temporal picture shines the eternal Light. And if we don’t close our eyes in fear or anxiety or shame, but let the Light shine on our psyche (our lives) and into our hearts (our treasure), the treasures become eternal. We store up eternal treasure in heaven.

- We see a cup and a child. The Light shines, and we give the cup to the child in love, and it becomes eternal.
- We see a flower. The Light shines, and we give thanks, and it somehow becomes eternal.
- We’re abandoned and confused. The Light shines, and we have faith, and faith is eternal.
- We despair. The Light shines, and we have hope.
- We’re beaten and persecuted for righteousness’ sake. The Light shines, and we learn to love like Jesus. Faith, hope, and love abide.
- We sin . . . really bad. We murder the only good man who ever lived. The Light shines, and we surrender, and we see the heart of God.

If you've ever wondered why the world is so wide and time is so long, why there are so many moments, I suspect it is because God is so good and so glorious that in order to show us Himself, He has to reveal bits and pieces of Himself spread throughout space and time, yet they're all revealed by His one Light—Jesus.

I imagine heaven is like an implosion of glory where all space and time come together in Jesus and reveal the glory of God. You realize the eternal city, the New Jerusalem, is literally constructed of treasure stored up in heaven while we walked on earth. (Twelve apostles, twelve tribes, the jewels on the priests' gown . . . the nations gathered in.) We must have seen the New Jerusalem when the light shown on the old Jerusalem. Perhaps we see the new world hidden in this old world whenever we let the Light shine.

Well now, you see that this old world—material world—is always changing . . . food, clothes, birds, grass. To live in time is to constantly die. If all your life is no more than food and clothing, then all your treasure will die, rot, and fade away. And *you* will die, rot, and fade away.

It's no wonder you're anxious! You were made to seek eternal treasure (the kingdom). But all your treasure dies, including your self. We confuse our temporal psyche with eternal treasure and get neurotic, psychotic, and stuck in a moment—a temporal moment. We can't grow, we can't change, we can't live, and we can't die . . . because we're already dead. We stopped dancing.

Wednesday night I was lying in bed worrying, worrying about my sermon on not worrying. And mostly I was worrying about worship without Bill. If you're like me, there have been moments in our worship with Bill leading that you experienced eternal treasure. (It's stored in the heart and in the New

Jerusalem.) If you try to hang on to the treasure in time, you make it temporal and you miss the treasures God has in the next frame of the picture.

We miss the treasure *now* trying to recreate treasures from the past in the future. When we're burdened by the past and worried about the future, we miss the treasure *now*.

Einstein said that if you traveled at the speed of light, all times, all pictures, would be present in an eternal now. Jesus said, "I AM . . . the light." All pictures are eternally present to Him. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life." *Now* is the point your time touches eternity; *now* you have faith; *now* is when you store up treasure in heaven.

The Evil One tempts us to live in the past or live in the future, because that's not living. Eternal life is *now*. Sometimes we're stuck in the future with anxiety; sometimes we're stuck in the past with fear. In fact, ever since the garden, we've been stuck in a bad picture, psyched out. We've been *psyched out*.

When you first saw the Highlights Hidden Picture picture, you saw a Teddy Bear Factory, and you saw a Teddy Bear Factory because pictures from the past gave meaning to the picture in the present. All those pictures in your past make up your life, that is, your psyche. Your psyche is how you, on your own, give meaning to every picture.

Have you ever met someone who responded to you in a totally bizarre manner so that you realized they're not even relating to you? They're relating to a picture in their past. They don't even *know* you. They can't *see* you.

[Singing]

“You’ve got to get yourself together;
You got stuck in a moment and you can’t get out of it.”

That’s Satan’s strategy: to get us “stuck in a moment” so we can’t live *now*, can’t dance *now*, can’t have eternal life *now*. “This is eternal life, knowing God and Jesus whom He sent” (John 17). I can only know a person *now*. I can know *about* a person in the past or in the future, but I can only dance with a person *now*, trust a person *now*.

I join the great dance *now*, commune with Jesus *now*, and He makes me live *now*. The beast in Revelation is “he who was and is not and is to come.” Maybe that means he only has power in our past and our future. I’m convinced Satan’s only real power is to psych us out so we won’t look to Jesus *now*!

Jesus said, “Stop worrying about your psyche. Lose your psyche for my sake and you will find it. The good shepherd lays down his psyche for the sheep.”

Jesus died and rose from the dead to give new meaning to all our pictures, to give us His psyche—His life.

When ritual abuse survivors are stuck in a past moment, they are so terrified they are often unwilling to look at the picture or too ashamed to see Jesus in the picture. It’s repressed, yet it controls all their present. In prayer they can go back to the memory and ask Jesus to reveal the true meaning, the hidden picture. Often He does it with visions, and the horrifying pictures are transformed into treasure and then stored in heaven. And the person is free to live in the moment *now*. Their psychology is transformed into theology.

I’ve seen it in miraculous ways involving demons, angels, and visions, yet it’s exactly what happens whenever you forgive.

Whenever you confess, whenever you surrender something to Jesus, Jesus (Theo-Logos) transforms all your pictures.

And by the way, this church is full of wonderful, Christian psychologists I highly respect. I just think they should be called theologists . . . because what they do is take troubled psyches and help people apply Jesus . . . turn psychologies (self meanings) into theologies (God meanings). They help people see the treasure *now*, see Jesus *now*, and live *now*.

Do you believe Jesus *now*?

If you're worried, anxious, and fearful, your psychology has a different meaning than Jesus, and you've been psyched out. Obviously, we've *all* been psyched out, for we worry about food and clothes and nourishment and covering our egos. We worry about our lives. But Jesus came to give theo-logos to all our psycho-logos.

Worried about food?

Jesus says, "I am the bread of life broken for you. Take and eat."

Worried about drink?

Jesus says, "My blood is drink indeed. Drink of it all of you for the forgiveness of sins."

Worried about clothing?

Jesus clothes you in Himself, the glory of God.

Worried about your life—your psyche?

Jesus says, "Lose it and I'll give you mine — eternal life."

So He sat on the hillside 2000 years ago, and they didn't know Him. They all left Him when He was crucified, when He died. They were psyched out!

He's here now. Can you see? That is, do you believe, or are you too psyched out?

A monk was being chased by a man-eating tiger. He raced to the edge of a cliff and spotted a rope hanging over the edge of the cliff. He grabbed it and began climbing down the rope out of reach of the tiger.

He looked down and saw jagged rocks 500 feet below. He looked up and saw the tiger waiting above. Just then, just beyond his reach, he saw two mice begin to nibble the rope. What to do? His past was chasing him, his future was death. He saw a strawberry within arm's reach, growing on the face of the cliff. He plucked it, ate it, and exclaimed, "That's the best strawberry I've ever tasted in my entire life!"

Stuck in his past or anxious about his future, he would have missed his treasure *now*. Your treasure is Jesus *now*. "Fine," you say. "But the monk on the cliff dies!" So? . . . Is that a bad moment?

"All flesh is like grass; the grass withers, the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord abides forever." "That Word is the good news that was preached to you. You've been born anew through the living and abiding Word of God" (I Peter 1:23-24).

Hebrews 2:14: "He partook of our nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage."

So consider the birds, the lilies, and the grass. They don't fear death! Birds toil and labor and die . . . but that doesn't stop them from singing. Lilies and grass get trampled and thrown into the fire, but that doesn't stop them from displaying God's

glory. Birds, lilies, and grass don't get psyched out. They have no choice but to trust their maker.

Jesus did have a choice — a psyche. Let's consider Jesus. There would come a day when He would die for the sins of the world, a day when He would be stripped of glory far greater than Solomon's, a day when He'd be cast into the fire. Yet He trusted His father and let "each day's trouble be sufficient for the day." I believe Jesus lived each moment.

- When someone told a joke, I bet He laughed loudest.
- When someone told a story, I bet He was the best listener.
- When the sun shone and the rains came, I bet He enjoyed them the most.
- When He ate a strawberry, I bet He tasted it with great joy.
- When someone was injured, I bet He felt their pain.
- When He went to a funeral, I bet He wept the deepest tears.
- When they danced in the courtyard of the temple, I bet His dance was the best.

And when His Father whispered, "Son, today's the day," He poured out His heart, picked up His cross, and trusted His Father unto death. And now death is swallowed up in victory.

I had lunch with my dad this week. He's 83. He's been burned and trampled, and his flower is falling. But he still sings His maker's praise and displays His glory. I know he's been psyched out at times, but God is bigger than his psyche and uses it all anyway.

I asked Dad about a class he wants to teach here this year. It's entitled "How To Die." He said, "Oh, Peter, I don't know if I have anything to say." I said, "Dad, just that you're willing to talk! We're all so afraid of the day we die that we can't live *now*." I said, "Just don't plan a graduation ceremony."

Well, I think I know what he'll say: How you die is how you live . . . without worry, trusting Jesus. In fact, the last frame, the last picture, is now the best picture, for all the picture is swallowed up by treasure and life! All our transient psychology becomes eternal theology. We are the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

On that day I'll be there and our family will be there. His grandkids will be there, and World War II buddies will be there. Bomb shelter Bible studies will be there, and folks that were sick and in prison will be there. Our cabin site in Frisco will be there. Birds will be there and lilies will be there and grass will be there.

Bread and wine and the finest clothes and good strawberries . . . all those treasures he stored in heaven while on earth . . . he'll get them all back, and they'll all be in Jesus. They're all stories of Jesus, places he's seen Jesus.

He'll see Jesus and realize he's seen Jesus wherever he walked in faith . . . even here.

So what are you worried about?

For on the night He was betrayed, having given thanks, He took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way after supper He took the cup and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant in

my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me. I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until I drink it with you in my Father's kingdom."
(Remember — that's the place where everyone dances.)

So if Jesus is your treasure, and you want Him to show you treasure, come to the table. In Jesus' name, store some treasure in heaven. That's a moment where your time touches eternity. That means Jesus transforms all your time, the past and the present and the future. And the Light shines on all your life. He is in all the pictures. You don't need to be stuck in any of them.

Maybe some of you are feeling ashamed. Maybe some of you are feeling you've done everything right, but maybe some are thinking, "Man, I've really screwed up." Maybe everything is going well for some of you, but maybe some of you are feeling like you're being crucified. Don't shut your eyes! Keep looking. There's treasure in the picture. And He wants to dance with you.

In Jesus' name, do not be psyched out! Amen.

Further Reading

Whenever you listen to a nightingale, therefore, you are listening to an excellent preacher.

Martin Luther

When the sparrow builds its nest in the forest, it occupies but a single branch. When the deer slakes its thirst at the river, it drinks no more than its belly can hold. We collect things because our hearts are empty.

Anthony DeMello

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life [“psyche”], what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

Matthew 6:25

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls [“psyche”]. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:29-30

“For whoever would save his life [“psyche”] will lose it, and whoever loses his life [“psyche”] for my sake will find it.”

Matthew 16:25

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life [“zoe”], and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life [“psyche”] for the sheep.”

John 10:10-11

One may, of course, be confused and one may doubt; but whoever once believes has something like a *character*

indelibilis. He may take comfort of the fact that he is being upheld. Everyone who has to contend with unbelief should be advised that he ought not to take his own unbelief too seriously. Only faith is to be taken seriously; and if we have faith as a grain of mustard seed, that suffices for the devil to have lost his game.

Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline

It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being ["psyche"]"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.
1 Corinthians 15:44-45

"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day."

Matthew 6:34

Neurosis: In psychoanalytic theory, a broad term for mental disorders whose primary symptoms are anxiety or what seem to be defenses against anxiety.

Gleitman, Psychology, 2nd Edition

Neurosis is always a substitute for legitimate suffering.

Carl Jung

You got yourself stuck in a moment and you can't get out of it.

U2

Genuine repentance is . . . the act of the whole person in which he separates himself from elements of his being, discarding them into the past as something that no longer has any power over the present. . . . It cannot change the facts; what has happened has happened and remains so in all eternity! But the

meaning of the facts can be changed by the eternal, and the name of this change is the experience of “forgiveness.” . . . It is the eternal “now” which provides for us a temporal “now.” We live so long as “it is still today” - in the words of the letter to the Hebrews. Not everybody, and nobody all the time, is aware of this “eternal now” in the temporal “now.” But sometimes it breaks powerfully into our consciousness and gives us the certainty of the eternal, of a dimension of time which cuts into time and gives us our time.

Paul Tillich, The Eternal Now

“The humans live in time, but our Enemy [God] destines them to eternity. He therefore, I believe, wants them to attend chiefly to two things, to eternity itself and to that point of time which they call the Present. For the Present is the point at which time touches eternity. Of the present moment, and of it only, humans have an experience analogous to the experience which our Enemy [God] has of reality as a whole; in it alone freedom and actuality are offered them. He would therefore have them continually concerned either with eternity (which means being concerned with Him) or with the Present – either meditating on their eternal union with, or separation from, Himself, or else obeying the present voice of conscience, bearing the present cross, receiving the present grace, giving thanks for the present pleasure. Our business is to get them away from the eternal and from the Present. . . . We want a whole race perpetually in pursuit of the rainbow’s end, never honest, nor kind, nor happy now, but always using as mere fuel wherewith to heap the altar of the Future every real gift which is offered them in the Present.”

C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters

Decision is the awakening to the eternal. . . . In the end, the archenemy of decision is cowardice. Cowardice is constantly at

work trying to break off the good agreement of decision with
eternity.

Soren Kierkegaard, Provocations

All actual life is encounter.

Martin Buber

And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

John 17:3