

A. Background

At the time when Jesus spoke MT 6:24-34, the society in Israel was, in part, a “slave economy.” [Israel was now occupied by Rome. She was subservient to Roman “taxes.” She was ruled by Roman appointed governors and kings. And the Roman Empire at the time was becoming the most powerful in the world. Rome conquered a host of countries. She made many of those she conquered “slaves” to Roman “masters.”] Therefore, in MT 8, when the Roman centurion tells Jesus “*my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly,*” MT 8:6, he is more than likely referring, not just to a servant who was a paid worker, but to a “slave.”

So when Jesus says, “*no one can serve two masters,*” the original word translated “*serve*” in Jesus’ statement ordinarily meant “*serve as a slave*” or “*be enslaved.*” Therefore, the statement means “*no one can be a slave or be enslaved to two masters.*” Everyone in ancient Israel knew this to be absolutely true.

Several of Jesus’ stories, or parables, are about the master-slave or servant relationship and dynamic: MT 18:21-35; 21:33-40; 24:45-51; 25:14-30. LK 12:35-40, 42-48; 14:16-24; 16:1-13; 19:12-27. Paul addresses in several of his letters how the followers of Jesus who are slaves and masters are to treat one another.

The primary and expected responsibility of a slave in this economy was to carry out the master’s wishes and commands, i.e., to do whatever the master said. There is evidence in other writings that if a slave/servant disobeyed their masters, there were severe consequences.

Additionally, the first disciples of Jesus lived within the context of competing “Kingdoms,” i.e., governing systems. They had to navigate within the Roman government and the Jewish governing system allowed by Rome as they were learning from Jesus to live within the Kingdom or governing system of God. Each “Kingdom” said that its citizens had to obey and abide by its rules and regulations. Rome and its leadership said one thing. Jewish society and its leadership said another. Jesus is establishing in them still another.

Finally, the original word *mamwna* appears, not only in MT 6:24, but also in LK 6:9,11 and 15. In MT 6:2, it is translated by the English word “money” and “mammon.” It can also refer to “riches.” Georg Kittel, a German Linguist and scholar, has researched the use of Biblical terms in all ancient literature. Kittel discovered that *mamwna* also referred in an ancient Aramaic document to the Aramaic economic system and not just to the currency or money or riches used to buy and sell goods within that economy. So another legitimate way to think about Jesus’ words is that you cannot serve God and

the economy of His Kingdom and the Aramaic economy. And obviously, we live within the U.S. Economy.

B. What Does Jesus say in MT 6:24-34?

1. In 6:24, what exactly does Jesus say about attempting to serve two different “masters”?
2. What does he say results when you attempt to do this?
3. In 6:25, what does Jesus tell you not to do?
4. In 6:25, what question does he ask you?
5. In 6:26, at what object does Jesus tell you to look?
 - a. What observation does Jesus point out about them?
 - b. Who does Jesus say feeds them?
 - c. What does he ask you about them?
6. In MT 6:27, what does Jesus ask? [What is the unspoken answer to Jesus’ question?]
7. In Mt 6:28, what does Jesus ask?
 - a. On what does he tell you to focus your attention?
 - b. What does he say about them?
8. In MT 6:29, what does Jesus point out?
9. In MT 6:30, what does Jesus stress to you?
10. In MT 6:31, what does Jesus say not to do?
 - a. What questions [“self-talk”] does Jesus tell you not to ask?
 - b. In MT 6:32, who runs after or pursues all these things?
 - c. Who does Jesus say knows that you need all these things?
11. In 6:33, what does Jesus say is to be the first and primary focus and concern that you are to seek and pursue?
 - a. If you seek this first, what does Jesus promise will be given to you?
 - b. In 6:34, about what does Jesus say not to worry?
 - c. Why does Jesus say not to worry about this?
 - d. In his last statement, upon what does say to focus your energies?

C. What does Jesus mean? (remember: context always determines meaning!)

1. What “two masters” or two Kingdoms were Jesus’ hearers living within?
2. What kind of conflicts would this cause in them?

3. How do you think the Roman and Jewish cultures and their economies would stir up worrying and anxiousness in the disciples?
4. Since God has provided more than adequate food for birds, what would the first disciples learn from observing how the birds acquired that provision God?
5. Since God has “clothed the lilies of the field,” how would God provide clothing for the first disciples?
6. Why do you think that worrying about what the disciples will wear, what they will drink or what they will wear be something Jesus needed to address in this direct way?
7. Where does Jesus say that “pagans” direct their energies when it comes to these essential things?
8. Do you think that they trusted that “the Father knows that you need them”? Why or why not?
9. Where does Jesus tell disciples to focus their minds and energies?
10. What does Jesus promise that God will do as they focus on seeking this?
11. Concerning tomorrow, where does Jesus tell them to focus their attention and why?

D. What does Jesus mean for you to do?

1. About what do you worry most?
2. Why do you worry about this?
3. When you think about it and are honest with yourself, what does your worrying about this do, i.e., what does it add?
4. When Jesus says, “*look at the birds of the air,*” as you do this what do you observe birds actually doing to get the food that God has provided for them?
5. What are Jesus’ implications for you from this observation?

6. When Jesus asks, “*Are you not much more valuable than they,*” how do you answer Jesus?
7. When Jesus asks you, “*Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to his life,*” how do you answer Jesus?
8. When Jesus stresses to you, “*If that is how God clothes the grass of the field... will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith,*” how does this impact you?
9. When Jesus says, “*Do not worry, saying...*,” how does your “self-talk,” i.e., the mental conversations you carry on with yourself, fuel your worrying?
10. What does Jesus charge you to do first to stop your “self-talk”?
11. When you did what Jesus says to do first, when is a time that God provided for you and how did he do it?

D. What are you going to do about what Jesus says in 6:24-34?

1. What hits you the hardest in what Jesus says?
2. What do you want to do about it?
3. What has to change in your own heart and mind for you to do what you want to do?
4. Can you do this on your own or do you need some form of help?
5. Who will support you in doing carrying this out to completion?
6. To whom will you report your progress, the obstacles you encounter or your failure?
7. Who will pick you up and help you succeed in doing what is on your heart to do?