

Was Jesus Right about God's Care?

Matthew 6:24-34

Turn to Deuteronomy 8. Our real text today is in Matthew 6, where Jesus tells us not to worry about food and clothing, about necessities, because God will provide these.

But first we'll look at Deuteronomy 8, because it teaches something similar to Jesus in Matthew 6, but does it in a different way.

In Deuteronomy, Moses was preaching a long sermon to Israel right at the end of the 40 years in the desert. He was getting them ready to go into Canaan. In Deuteronomy 8 he wants them to learn from two different experiences that God provides.

They already know what it is like to go hungry sometimes, and in a while they'll find out what it's like to have plenty of what they need. Both of those, says Moses, are to teach you the same thing: God provides for you.

The beginning of Deuteronomy 8 explains how being hungry teaches that God gives his people what they need.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 - Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. ³ He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

In the early days of the exodus, Israel ran out of food or water quite often, and then when they panicked God brought them what they needed. Then he let them run out again, and when they panicked again he brought them what they needed. What should they learn?

To teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. God's words are how he does things, how he makes things happen. To teach you that people eat and people drink when God makes it happen.

To teach you that you don't live by finding bread, you live by God speaking and saying, "let there be food for you, let there be water for you, let there be manna for you." God's words are how he does things, how God makes things happen. He speaks, and things happen. Let there be light, and there was light.

We don't live by finding bread, we live when God speaks and makes food happen. ³ *He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*

We are entirely dependent on God saying: "let there be food." Moses says that what we learn from going hungry, and then getting what we need, is that God provides for us.

What do we learn from having plenty? Moses covered that as well. We learn the same thing: that God provides.

Deut 8:12-14, 17-18 - When you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down,¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied,¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God . . .¹⁷ You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." ¹⁸ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

When we have lots, God has given the ability to produce it. According to Moses, the other way of thinking is to forget God and become proud.

Let's summarize this: in Deuteronomy 8 Moses describes two experiences, **first** the experience of not having enough and then getting what we need, then again not having enough and getting what we need, all this again and again: this experience was designed by God to teach them *and us* that God is the Provider.

The **second** experience is having lots, no worries, lots of food and money and everything looks secure. According to Moses, this also teaches them *and us* that God is the Provider.

This is all interesting because we don't necessarily learn that from either experience. When we struggle to have enough, we consider that clear evidence that God is not providing well, if he's even involved at all. And when we have plenty, we tend to feel either fortunate or pleased with ourselves.

And if we learn the wrong thing, says Moses, we will turn to a different God.

So, was Moses right? Is God the Provider? The experience of running out and then having enough and running out and then having enough, again and again: should we actually take that as God teaching us that he provides?

Does the experience of always having plenty: is this God providing lavishly? Do both experiences point the same way? Was Moses right? The Scripture is pretty clear about this; Jesus was too, as we'll see.

How YOU think about this will shape your life. It is not an empty choice. I don't mean what we say we believe. What we say we believe may not make much difference. But what we actually believe shapes our lives.

Matthew 6:24-34 - *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.* ²⁵ *“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?”*

Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothes.

The problem is not the truth in this line. We all agree that life is more important than food and drink, and our bodies are more important than clothes. The problem is the logic.

Jesus thinks that life being more than food, and body being more than clothes, is a good reason not to worry about food or clothes. How does that work?

Having life and bodies is exactly why we do worry about food and clothes. Having a body and keeping it alive means we have to have food and clothes and shelter. How is it a reason not to worry?

This only works if having bodies and being alive is an ongoing gift from God. Suppose that a living body was an hour by hour and minute by minute gift from God. God gave us bodies, formed each body in its mother's womb, as Ps 139 teaches.

And God keeps putting life into our bodies, hour by hour, as long as we are alive. It is not that if God stops we are on our own. It is that if God stops we are dead, immediately.

If God is the one who gave us bodies at the start, and God is the one who works hour by hour and minute by minute to keep us alive, then this sentence of Jesus' makes sense.

If God is doing all that already, if it is all steady gift, ongoing gift, then we could also count on him to supply food and clothing. If we are counting on him every minute just to be alive, then we could count on him also to supply food and clothing.

It turns out that we are a lot more dependent on God than we thought. The good news is that apparently God is reliable, because we do have living bodies, whatever else is wrong no question about that.

Problem: we don't think this way about our bodies and our being alive. Jesus is *not* saying, “Don't worry about food, just trust what I say, don't worry about clothing, just trust what I say.” He's not saying that. He is giving reasons. He thinks he makes sense.

Was he right? To the world around us, Jesus was hopelessly naïve. To Jesus, the world around us lives in a sad darkness about our Father's care. Who's right?

²⁵ *“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? If God gives the bigger gifts every day, will he not supply the smaller things?”*

Your heavenly Father feeds the birds (Matthew 6:27)

²⁶ *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?*

Let's talk about robins. They are the birds I've watched gather food and eat more than any other. Robins hop on the ground and eat mostly earthworms.

A robin stands still for a few seconds, then hops three or four feet and jams its beak into the ground and comes up with a worm in its mouth. Sometimes they hop three or four feet and then stop again, then one more hop and stick their beak into the ground and come up with a worm.

When they stop they sometimes turn their head a bit, or lean it to the side a bit. Are they listening? Watching? Can they feel with their feet where the worm is moving? I don't know. Rarely do they come up empty, though. It works. Have any of you watched this?

Jesus said that our heavenly Father feeds the robins, and that we should not worry about food because of what God does with robins.

Robins spend most of their day looking for food. Jesus is not teaching that we should not work, he's teaching that we should not worry, should not be anxious about these things.

We tend to look at what robins do and be impressed with how God made them, because God made them so that they can figure out where the worms are and they can get the worms. That's true. God did make them that way.

But if that's all that's going on here I don't see that Jesus can say that God feeds them. If that's all that's going on, then God made them so they can feed themselves.

And if God made them so they can feed themselves, if that's all Jesus means, I don't see much reason not to worry about food and clothing.

What if God is at work every time we watch a robin hunt for worms and eat? What if, when the robin came north in spring, God helped the robin settle in a place that had enough earthworms?

What if, every time a robin hops around looking for worms, God was helping that robin find the next worm? What if God was helping that robin all day long, helping it find the worm, giving it strength to go over there and poke its beak down and get that worm?

Then Jesus could say that God feeds the robins, and then we could trust God to take care of us, to lead us to where the food was, help us find it, and give us strength to get it.

Jesus assumed our Father's minute by minute and hour by hour involvement with all that he made. We don't think like this. Was Jesus right?

In Matthew 10 Jesus said that the very hairs on our head are numbered. Maybe God has a hair fixation, and needs to know how many there are. Probably not.

If God knows how many hairs are on your head, he knows exactly the condition of each of your fingernails and toenails, he knows which of your teeth are doing well and which have problems, and he knows about every muscle and every bone and a lot of other details that we don't really want to talk about here. Was Jesus right about God's care?

In that place in Matthew 10 Jesus also said that not one sparrow falls to the ground without your heavenly Father. Google says there 1,000 billion birds on earth. This is a guess, you understand. If that is true, about 25 million birds will die during the time of this sermon. Our Father is there for every one of those. And that's just birds.

Jesus assumed our Father's hour by hour and minute by minute involvement with all that he made, to a degree of detail we can't grasp.

Jesus is not teaching that God always protects life. Ps 104 praises God for feeding all that he made. But Ps 104 includes this: ²⁷ *All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time.* ²⁸ *When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.* ²⁹ *When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.*

In at least two different places Paul wrote about not having enough food and clothing (1 Corinthians 4, Philippians 4). Sometimes he went without, sometimes he had lots.

Remember Deuteronomy 8, when God humbled his people and tested them by letting them get desperate and then feeding them. This was to teach them that he provides.

The point is that it all comes from God. We think that when God stops providing for us, then we have to do it on our own. No. When God stops providing, then we die. We don't ever do it on our own, no one does.

There are a lot of birds eating every day. Jesus said our Father feeds every one of them; not their Father, *our* Father.

Your heavenly Father clothes the flowers.

²⁷ *Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?* ²⁸ *“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labour or spin.”* ²⁹ *Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.* ³⁰ *If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?* ³¹ *So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’* ³² *For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.*

How exactly does God clothe the flowers? We tend to see God only as the designer of flowers, he made each kind of flower with its own unique beauty, and that beauty is built into each species of flower, so that when the sun shines and the ground gets rain, that flower is just what happens.

If that is true, though, then why should we not worry about clothes? When we see God as only as designer, then the logic would say that God designed people to be able to make clothes for themselves. That's not really our heavenly Father clothing the flowers, and it is not much of a reason for me not to worry.

What if our Father was a part of every single bud taking shape, forming inside the covering leaves, and our Father was a part of every flower unfolding and taking shape, our Father was making sure the petals came out properly and with the right colour?

Every single flower? There are more flowers than birds, I know that? But if our Father was a part of every single flower, then it would make sense that I did not need to worry about clothing. Was Jesus right? Was Moses right?

I am posing it as a question – was Jesus right? I don't mean to throw doubt. He was right. I put it as a question because I don't think we believe what Jesus was teaching. Since he was right, we need to change how we look at the world around us.

Jesus did not teach these things just to improve our state of mind, so that we'd not worry. He taught these things to free us to serve God. Jesus opened with, You cannot serve God and money, you can try but you can't, *therefore do not worry about food or clothing*. Our worry will pull us away from serving God.

Jesus ends with: ³³ *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*. Jesus wants to free us to be servants of God. Working does not prevent us from being servants of God, but worrying about having enough does.

For Moses it was the same. If Israel did not learn that God was their provider, if they did not learn that from both their troubles and their plenty, then they would forget God and worship something else.

Our Father being our provider is part of the foundation of obedience. Moses was right. God is always the provider. Jesus was right. Our Father keeps the details of life around us going on to a degree we hardly grasp. Our Father keeps us going, keeps our bodies and life going, to a degree we cannot grasp. We don't have a clue about his loving care.

There is no such thing as carrying on without God. Nothing carries on without our Father. Anything and everything that goes on living does so because our Father carries it.

So don't worry about tomorrow. You can worry about today, Jesus said, there is trouble today to worry about. But not tomorrow. Do not worry about tomorrow. Amen.