

MISCELLANEOUS
BIBLICAL STUDIES

CHAPTER SEVEN

NOTES ON MATTHEW 6:34
“SUFFICIENT UNTO THE DAY
IS THE EVIL THEREOF”

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VII
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Matthew 6:34

μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε εἰς τὴν αὔριον,
ἢ γὰρ αὔριον μεριμνήσει ἑαυτῆς·
ἄρκετον τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἡ κακία αὐτῆς.

KJV

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.

William Albright and F. C. S. Mann (1971: 80–82) accepted Matt 6:34 as the words of Jesus which concluded the pericope of Matt 6:25–34. They translated the words of Jesus in 6:34 as, “Do not be overconcerned about tomorrow, for tomorrow will do its own worrying. Today’s misfortune is enough for today.” They offered only this two sentence commentary on 6:34:

Unhappily it needs to be said here that all these lessons in detachment are *not* here summed up by an injunction to assume that discipleship will *ipso facto* produce the necessities of life. This verse, like its predecessors, calls for a searching examination of the disciples’ priorities.

By way of contrast, other commentators have suggested that Matt 6:33 was Jesus’ concluding statement in this discourse and 6:34 was a redactional addition. Matt 6:25–33 parallels closely Luke 12:22–31; but the question “and why are you anxious about clothing” in Matt 6:28 does not have a parallel at Luke 12:27. Similarly, the question in Luke 12:26, “if then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest?” is lacking at Matt 6:28. But the most significant difference is that at Luke 12:32 there is not a

verse equivalent to Matt 6:34. Consequently, Francis Beare (1987: 188) concluded,

The closing verse [Matt 6:34] is a Matthaean addition, and owes its place here to the verbal link in the charge ‘do not be anxious.’ But it may be that Matthew sees something more here than a mere verbal association. Perhaps he wants to remind us that Jesus does not offer any assurance that life will be better tomorrow than it is today. There is no resort to a facile optimism. We must face today’s problems with no faint dream that they will disappear overnight; but there is no point in anticipating them. For tomorrow, as for today, we pray, ‘Thy will be done.’

Similarly, for W. D. Davies and Dale Allison (1988: 662–663) Matt 6:34 was probably a redactional addition “linked to its context more by catchword than by theme.” They suggested that the repetition of the verb *μη μεριμνήσητε* “be not anxious” appearing in 6:31 and twice in the redactional conclusion in 6:34, “leave no doubt as to what is the key subject of 6.25–34 and how important it is for Matthew. The mental vice of anxiety is to be exorcized at all costs.” They concluded,

Whether unwittingly or not, Matthew does what the tradition did before him in 6.26–30, namely, take up a proverbial notion and use it to make a point contrary to the received sense. Both gnomic statements in 6.34, if taken in themselves, sound pessimistic or stoical (cf *b. Ber.* 9b). But embedded in their present, evangelical context, they gain a new sense: anxiety for the morrow is foolish because the all-powerful, all-knowing, compassionate Father in heaven is Lord of the future. If sufficient for the day is the evil thereof, God is more than sufficient in the midst of that evil.¹

Ulrich Luz (2007: 346) rightly noted that Matt 6:34 is linguistically and contextually very difficult. In a footnote (#68) Luz asked if there was an Aramaic construction behind the unusual Greek *μεριμνήσει ἑαυτῆς*, “it will be anxious of it-

self.” This question was answered many years ago by W. C. Allen (1912: 65) who, citing Julius Wellhausen (1904 *in loc.*), noted that “the harsh construction” μεριμνήσει ἑαυτῆς reflects a translation from the Aramaic.²

Luz’s observations included the following:

In a Semitic milieu αὔριον can mean not only tomorrow but *pars pro toto* the future in general. While the neutral predicate “sufficient” (ἄρκετον) at the beginning of a clause is possible in Greek, the genitive formulation “will be anxious of itself (μεριμνήσει ἑαυτῆς) is very unusual. “Evil” (κακία) does not have the usual meaning of moral wickedness; it has the more general meaning of hardship or trouble. The content is equally difficult. One can choose between a more optimistic and a more pessimistic interpretation. (a) Understood optimistically, this verse can speak of the possibility of living fully in the present. (b) The pessimistic interpretation is more probable, however, because with v. 34c the verse ends on a pessimistic note: all planning is futile; it is enough for a person to bear the burden of each day. . . . Eschatological hope and pessimistic realism could coexist.

As did Luz, so have many other commentators addressed the tension between Jesus’ optimistic teaching in Matt 6:25–33 (especially “all these things shall be added unto you”) and the more realistic and pessimistic conclusion in 6:34c, “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

The word κακία “evil” in 6:34c has been somewhat problematic. Davies and Allison (1988: 662) noted that κακία is a *hapax legomenon* in the synoptics. But it is well attested in the Septuagint where it translates רַעַע / רַע “evil” over ninety times and translates once, twice, or thrice each of the following: אִוְלָה “folly,” אָוֶן “trouble, wickedness,” חַטָּאת “sin,” כְּזָב “falsehood,” עֲוֹן “iniquity, guilt,” עֲנִי “affliction, poverty,” and עֲרֹוּהָ “nakedness, indecency.”³ Thus, κακία must be recognized as a very negative term.

Recently the tendency has been for commentators to reduce the tension between the optimism found in 6:25–33 and the pessimism in 6:34 by softening the meaning of this κακία from “evil” to “trouble” or “problem.” For example, John Nolland (2005: 316) commented:

It is likely that v. 34 does not have a comprehensive concern with evil, but that . . . the focus is on that aspect of evil which underlies the anxiety people feel about their daily needs. If one had to worry only about planting enough grain or working enough hours, then the human situation would be less worrisome. Anxiety is created primarily by the very real possibility that such arrangements will let us down (there will be a drought; our supplies will be destroyed; we will be robbed; etc.). The promise of God’s provision involves a promise to deliver us (from the consequences of) such eventualities as they press on us on a daily basis. If God looks after today, that will be enough. God does not abstractly guarantee the future; he deals with the needs of each today. This is the one-day-at-a-time perspective of the Lord’s Prayer which keeps so firmly in focus the immediacy of receiving from the hand of God. There is no need to worry about tomorrow because God will deal with it as the ‘today’ of that day.

Similarly, R. T. France (2007: 272) stated:

This additional saying [in 6:34] has the ring of popular proverbial wisdom. The thrust of its first clause is fully consonant both with the summons not to worry about provisions in vv. 25–33 and with the preceding petition, for “bread for the coming day” in 6:11; once you have asked God for tomorrow’s needs there is no need to worry about them. But the following clauses speak not of God’s fatherly concern but, in a quite pragmatic way, of the pointlessness of anticipating tomorrow’s problems. Taken out of its current context, this could, then, be read as simply a piece of cynical advice to live only for the present—the attitude condemned by Paul in 1 Cor 15:32 (following Isa 22:13; cf. 56:12), and indeed also by Jesus in Luke 12:19–20. In speaking of “tomorrow worrying”

and of “troubles” as the likely experience of each day v. 34 strikes a more pessimistic (or at least realistic) note than the preceding verses. By including it along with vv. 25–33 Matthew has perhaps deliberately put a sobering question mark against an unthinkingly euphoric attitude which vv. 25–33 might evoke in some hearers. God’s care and provision are assured, but that does not mean that the disciple’s life is to be one long picnic. Each day will still have its “troubles”; the preceding verses simply provide the assurance that by the grace of God they can be survived.

Although France did not specify here what the “troubles” (κακία) mentioned in 6:34 might be, Frederick Bruner (2009: 334–335) easily identified them. He translated 6:34 as “*So don’t ever be anxious about tomorrow; you see, tomorrow will worry for itself enough for today are today’s own problems*” and noted that “These three punchy sentences seem anticlimactic after the preceding noble promise [in 6:33].” Bruner justified his translation of κακία “evil” simply as “problems” with the following arguments and examples.

The *kakia*, “evil” or “trouble” (RSV, NRSV, NJB), that will be disciples’ daily lot is not the *objective* evil of the satanic against which the Lord’s Prayer warned us (*ho ponēros*, “the evil one” at the end of the Lord’s Prayer, is a power from whom disciples rightly prayed to be *delivered*); *kakia*. the “evil” here, is that *subjective* “evil” or “trouble” from which disciples can never be delivered; the word has the less ultimate sense of the “inconvenient” the daily “troubles” of distractions that keep us, we think, from devoting our time to God’s work . . . Few things bother serious disciples as much as the distractions that keep them from the matters that really count. It is these daily “troubles” that Jesus here calls evil in the subjective sense. Discipleship learns sooner or later, however, that it can pursue God’s kingdom and righteousness right in the middle of these daily “evils.” Brushing the children’s hair, grading students’ papers, going to committee meetings, entertaining unexpected visitors, and doing the

thousands of other earthly things that seem to distract us from more important things and from the one thing needful, can all be forms of kingdom-seeking and righteousness-doing when seen in faith. Thus when Jesus tells us (in the old English) that “sufficient unto the day are the evils thereof” or (in modern English) that “*enough for today are today’s own problems,*” he means that it will be by mastering these daily gremlins that we learn to be disciples. For grading students’ papers thoughtfully, while it takes teachers away from writing and reading, helps students considerably. Parents’ brushing children’s hair, though it takes them from more elevated tasks for the moment, may be one of the few chances parents and children have to touch each other that day. These “evils” then, may be “sufficient” in unexpected ways.

Though well argued the attempts by Nolland, France, Bruner, and others, to soften the meaning of *κακία* “evil” so as to reduce the tension between the optimism in Matt 6:33 and the pessimism in 6:34, are far from convincing, especially the suggestion that simply brushing a child’s hair can be a kind of *κακία* “evil.” But with the Greek text of 6:34 being what it is these interpretations are among the best that can be made.⁴

But an alternative and better interpretation of Matt 6:33–34 becomes available by recognizing (as did Wellhausen, Allen, and Luz, as noted above) that the Greek text is probably a translation from an Aramaic/Hebrew source. Of the different Hebrew words (listed above) which were translated by *κακία* the *עָנִי*/*κακία* “affliction, poverty” in Neh 9:9 in Sinaiticus² (in contrast to the *ταπεινωσις* “affliction” in Vaticanus, Alexandrinus and Sinaiticus¹) provides the best clue for recovering the *Vorlage* of Matt 6:34.³

This Aramaic/Hebrew *עָנִי* is a homograph of two distinctly antithetical words. There is the well attested *עָנִי*/*עָנִי* “poor” (pronounced *a-knee*) and the rare *עָנִי*/*עָנִי* “rich” (pronounced a bit like *an-eye*).⁵ This *עָנִי* “rich” is the cognate of the Arabic

غنى (*ḡaniya*) “he was free from want . . . he became rich, wealthy,” and the nouns غِنَى (*ḡinan*) and غِنَاء (*ḡanaʿ*) “wealth, affluence, riches” (Lane 1877:2301–2304; Wehr 1979: 803; Hava 1915:537).⁶

The word עָנִי / עֲנִי “rich” appears in I Chron 22:14, where, contrary to the Masoretic pointing of עָנִי as עֲנִי, David declared וְהִנֵּה בְעֲנִי הִכִּינֹתִי לְבֵית־יְהוָה “Behold, *with my riches/resources* have I provided for the temple of Yahweh!”⁷ Most translations have avoided making David into a billion dollar “pauper” by paraphrasing בְּעֲנִי as

- “in my trouble” (KJV, RWB, WEB),
- “I have taken much trouble” (NKJ),
- “I have taken great pains” (NIV, NIB),
- “with great pains” (RSV, NRS, NAU, NAS),
- “in my/mine affliction” (ASV, BBE, DBY),
- “I have worked hard” (NLT).

The בְּעֲנִי was translated literally in the NJB as “poor as I am” and in the DRA as “in my poverty.” Curtiss (1910: 259) argued unconvincingly: “Possibly in Gn 31³² and certainly in Dt 26⁷, עָנִי means oppressive toil. . . . The parallel כָּחִי בְּכָל כֹּחִי [“with all my power”] in 29² favours *by my hard* (or *painful*) labor.”⁸ But once the עָנִי is repointed—in light of the cognate غِنَاء (*ḡanaʿ*) “wealth, resources”—as עֲנִי a literal reading of the text makes sense for David had become wealthy.

Moreover, the name of the Levite singer Unni (עֲנִי = LXX Ωνι), mentioned in I Chron 15:18, 20 and the *Qere* of Neh 12:9, was probably a *Pu^cal* perfect (*unnay* > *unnê*) meaning either “he was afflicted” (עָנָה stem III) or “he was enriched” (עָנָה stem V). An *afflicted* Levite was unlikely to have been appointed to the royal court or cult; whereas one who “was freed from want” would have well qualified for such a posi-

tion. Thus, the rare lexeme עָנִי “free from want, rich” was no doubt in use in the days of the Levite Unni.

This rare עָנִי “rich” may also appear in Prov 31:5, 9 in reference to Lemuel’s need to adjudicate on behalf of the rich as well as the poor. The MT דִּין כָּל-בְּנֵי עָנִי “the judgment of all the needy” can be repointed as דִּין כָּל-בְּנֵי-עָנִי “the judgment of all the sons of wealth,” i.e., the rich. If Lemuel obeyed his mother he rightly judged the poor (אֶבְיֹן), the needy (בְּנֵי-עָנִי), and the wealthy (בְּנֵי-עָנִי).

Once the words עָנִי “poor” and עָנִי “rich” are in focus one can appreciate the ambiguity of what may have been in the *Vorlage* of Matt 6:34c, be it the Hebrew לֹא לְיוֹם עָנִיּוֹ or the Aramaic מִסְתָּא לְיוֹמָא עָנִיָּיה לָהּ. Thus, the Aramaic/Hebrew עָנִי meant either χρημα “money/assets” or πλοῦτος “resources/wealth” or κακία “evil/trouble. Consequently, Matt 6:34 as spoken by Jesus may well have meant, “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Sufficient for the day will be its *resources/riches*. Because the cognate غني (*ganiya*) meant “he was free from want,” the עָנִי in the *Vorlage* of 6:34 could have been translated as “welfare” —“sufficient unto the day is the *welfare* thereof.” (Jesus was speaking out of experience, for, according to Luke 8:3, Joanna, Susanna, and many others provided out of their *resources* for the *welfare* of Jesus and his disciples.) If this interpretation is correct there was no tension between the optimistic verses 6:25–33 and a pessimistic verse 6:34. To the contrary, the optimism in 6:34, as interpreted here, matches the optimism in 6:33, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

NOTES

1. The following partial paragraph (with bullets added) from Davies and Allison (1988: 662) is noteworthy:

Both 6.34a and 34b appear to have been drawn from the well of common wisdom and probably go back ultimately to Egyptian proverbs Compare the following [the bullets have been added]:

- The Eloquent Peasant 183: ‘do not prepare for tomorrow before it is come. One knows not what evil may be in it’;
- Instruction of Amen-em-Opet 19.11–13: ‘Do not spend the night in fear of the morrow. At dawn what is the morrow like? One knows not what the morrow is like’;
- Proverbs 27:1: ‘Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth’;
- *b. Sanh.* 100b / *b. Yeb.* 63b: ‘Do not fret over tomorrow’s troubles, for you do not know what a day may bring forth. Tomorrow may come and you will be no more and so you will have grieved over a world that is not yours’;
- *b. Ber.* 9b: ‘The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses, Go and say to Israel, I was with you in this servitude, and I shall be with you in the servitude of other kingdoms. He said to Him, Lord of the universe, sufficient is the evil in the time thereof.’

2. Neither Allen nor Luz offered a reconstruction of the Aramaic *Vorlage*, although Davies and Allison identified $\kappa\alpha\kappa\lambda\alpha$ with the הַרְעָה “trouble” and the $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \tau\eta\nu\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\iota\omicron\nu$ with לְמָחָר “for tomorrow.”

3. See Hatch and Redpath, 1954: 708.

4. Note Keener’s comments (1999: 238) on Matt 6:34^{ab}:

Yet when Jesus graphically forbids his disciples to worry about tomorrow (6:34; cf. “worries” also in 10:19; 13:22; Phil 4:6) this does not suggest that he expects them to ignore whatever concerns arise. Rather he expects them to express dependence on God in each of these concerns, praying for their genuine needs (6:11), provided they pray for God’s Kingdom most of all (6:9–10; most of Paul’s “concerns” fit this category—2 Cor 11:28; 1 Thess 3:1–5).

Keener did not comment on the phrase “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” in Matt 6:34^c.

5. Compare the consonantal spelling of the English words *better* (= *bttr*) and *bitter* (= *bttr*). How will one interpret my assertion: “Now that Barak Obama is President the relationship of the Democrats and Republicans in Congress will be *bttr*”? The political bias of the interpreter will no doubt control the meaning given to the *bttr* in this written quotation. The Aramaic/Hebrew עני “poor” and עני “rich” present a similar ambiguity for translators.

6. The Arabic cognate of עָנָה “to sing” is غنى (*gʾanaya*). It has been recognized in the lexicons of Biblical Hebrew, along with عَنُو (*ʿanawa*) “to be humble, submissive,” the cognate of עָנָה “poor, meek.”

7. Myers (1965: 152) interpreted the hundred thousand talents of gold and million talents of silver David donated to be 3,775 tons of gold and 37,750 tons of silver, which he estimated to be worth 4.25 billion dollars. Despite the Vulgate’s *paupertatula* “poverty” and the Septuagint’s πτωχεία “poverty” the MT עָנָה “my poverty” needs to be read as עָנָה “my wealth.”

Given the frequent interchange of א and א in Hebrew roots, the graphic similarity of א and א in certain scripts, and the coalescence in Hebrew of the *gayin* (ג) with the *ayin* (ע), it is not surprising that עני and עני were so easily confused that עני dropped out of usage and became lost to lexicographers.

Once the shift was made from the clarity of oral literature to the ambiguities of a written literature which used a consonant-only orthography, the plague of homographs resulted in the loss of many words from the active vocabulary.

8. In BDB (777) בְּעֵינַי was paraphrased as “in spite of my frustration.”