

Living Free From Worry Pt. 1

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Matthew 6:25-34

We are all fallen and, therefore, we all struggle to differing degrees with sinful, inordinate self-concern - worry. For the problem-solving types this morning, let me give you an equation for worry: preoccupation with self-concern + distrust in the character of God = worry and anxiety. As we will see from our text this morning, we struggle with worry and anxiety ultimately because we struggle with distrust. Though we may never verbalize our distrust in these particular words, our thinking and our actions (worry and anxieties) demonstrate that we struggle to believe two fundamental truths about God: first, that He is sovereignly in control of every circumstance that comes to pass in my life. Secondly, that He cares and desires to be intimately involved in the circumstances He ordains for me.

Let's turn our attention to our text for this morning. Let me encourage you to stand, if you have the ability, as we read our text. Matthew, recording Jesus' teaching, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pens the following words:

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will 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 a single hour 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 you 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 after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Matthew 6:25-34

Brothers and sisters, "The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" Isaiah 40:8.

WHAT DOES WORRY MEAN

The Greek word for anxious or worry in verse 25 is (μεριμνάω – merimnao), from meridzo. It carries the idea of being divided, pulled apart, or separated into pieces. That is what worry and anxiety does to us – it pulls us apart. What are some typical things that you worry about? We worry about things like:

- How are we going to pay these bills?
- What would he /she think if they really knew me?
- How am I going to accomplish all that is on my plate?
- What if I am diagnosed with a life altering illness?
- Will I fail? Will I succeed?
- Should I take this job or that one?
- What if I don't get the job? What if I lose my job?
- I'm such a sinner; will God really forgive me?
- What if I am treated adversely for my faith in Christ?
- Will I pass the test? Am I really saved?
- What if they choose someone else over me?
- Will my children turn out right (godly)?
- What if I can't have children?
- What if he / she doesn't keep their commitment to me?
- What if the airplane crashes?
- What if they ask me to speak?
- What if I say the wrong thing?
- What if they put me to sleep and I don't wake up?
- What if we have only seen the beginning of the floor dropping out from under the economy?
- What will happen if this candidate wins?

I. WORRY IS ROOTED IN A DISTRUST OF GOD'S GOODNESS.

Worry is an indicator of wrong thinking. We worry when we fail to apply the character and promises of God to our circumstances.

A. Worry is wrong thinking about our life's purpose (v.25)

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

The "therefore" here in verse 25 connects us back to the preceding words of Jesus. In other words, worry and anxiousness aren't isolated. Jesus teaches us that worry and anxiousness are the result of misplaced treasure. When we fix our hopes on the treasures of this world, we will most certainly fear the loss of those treasures. If we mistakenly think that our ultimate purpose is to protect our frail and temporary frames that are here today and gone tomorrow, we will be riddled with fear.

B. Worry is wrong thinking about our place in God's plan. (v.26-30)

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 a single hour 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 you of little faith?

The birds and the lilies, with their absence of concern, teach a huge lesson concerning our reliance upon God. Jesus notes that the sparrows don't engage in agricultural processes like sowing and reaping, yet neither do they starve. It's important to note that though they neither sow nor reap, neither are they idle. Jesus isn't encouraging laziness or inactivity. Is anything busier than the sparrow? The point Jesus is making is that though the sparrows are in constant search for food, none of them are suffering from hypertension - God takes care of them. Notice also that Jesus doesn't say "their" heavenly Father feeds them, but rather, "your" heavenly Father feeds them. The very Father in whom the anxious have ceased to trust even provides for the improvident birds.¹

Martin Luther said, "God makes the birds our schoolmasters and teachers. It is a great challenge to us that a helpless sparrow should become a theologian and a preacher to the wisest of men... Whenever you hear a sparrow, you are listening to an excellent preacher. It is as if he were saying, 'The Lord takes care of me.' God is both the cook and the host. Everyday He feeds innumerable little birds from His hand."² We watch it daily, yet we worry.

*Said the robin to the sparrow:
I should really like to know
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so.*

*Said the sparrow to the robin:
Friend, I think that it must be
That they have no heavenly Father,
Such as cares for you and me.³*

Jesus points first to the sparrow and then to the lilies of the field. He says, "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 you of little faith?" The lilies of the field were common, ordinary wildflowers. There wasn't necessarily anything special about them other than the fact that they made good fuel for the fire. But if you were able to zoom in on the petals of a lily, you would see an intricacy and magnificence that would put Solomon's costly and ornate robes to shame. Though the common lilies don't labor and toil, they show the care and concern of God over creation. The point Jesus makes is that you and I, who are made in God's image, are certainly not left out to dry if God takes such great care of the lesser sparrows and lilies.

¹ Leon Morris, *PNTC: The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 91-92.

² John R. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), 164.

³ *ibid*, 165.

The sparrows and lilies stand as a gentle rebuke our foolish nervousness. Look at verse 27. Jesus says, “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” Not only do worry and anxiety not add to the quality of your life, but neither do they add to the span of your life. Even if we could eliminate or in some way ensure that everything we worried about never truly happened, it still wouldn’t prolong our lives for a second.

C. Worry is wrong thinking about the character of God. (v. 31-32)

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

John MacArthur says, “[Christians] who worry believe God can redeem them, break the shackles of Satan, take them from hell to heaven, put them into His kingdom, give them eternal life, but just don’t think He can get them through the next couple of days.” What are we saying about God when we worry? We are calling His care, concern, and provision into question. We are treating Him who gives us life, breath and being with suspicion, if not contempt.

I think about those disciples in Mark 4 who chastised Jesus when the storm rocked the boat of their little world. Panic-stricken and riddled with fear, the disciples wake Jesus saying, “Teacher, do you not *care* that we are perishing?” From the disciples’ perspective Jesus was unaware of their plight. They thought that Jesus was oblivious to their misery – that He had forsaken them. Don’t we often feel that way too, in the middle of life’s storms? We mistakenly conclude that we are all alone, that no one, not even God, knows what is happening or how we are feeling. Christian, nothing could be farther from the truth. God knows every wave that falls on you and He is using each one for a specific purpose. When life *seems* most out of control, it could never be more in control!

II. JESUS HAS THE ANSWER FOR OUR ANXIOUS HEARTS.

A. God knows what you need – trust Him. (v. 31-32)

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

B. God has called you to a higher purpose – seek Him. (v. 33)

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

When you seek first the Kingdom of God, your focus is no longer on what you wear, eat, or drink. If we fix our eyes on seeking Christ, there will scarcely be any room for concern about lesser matters. In other words, if we seek God's Kingdom and Righteousness, the care of the day will flee.⁴

C. God has designed you to live one day at a time – obey Him. (v. 34)

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Jesus personifies worry when He speaks about tomorrow being anxious for itself. Worry is seen as a power, almost a person, who takes hold of you. Worry has an active imagination. It can envision all sorts of possibilities and eventualities. As a result, it's a very convenient wave for Satan to ride upon.⁵

Future worry is overwhelming. There's a reason. We don't have grace today for tomorrow. One of Satan's simplest tricks and most effective devices is to draw our attention to things we can do nothing about. There's nothing worse than a crisis that can't be fixed. If our hours are spent with thoughts of tomorrow's problems, which are not accessible today and which we know we cannot touch with today's resources, we are doomed to worry. And worry wears us out... [Yet] our calling is today. It's not that we don't think of tomorrow, but it must consistently be filed under "future grace." The tide of confidence in God's sufficiency must wash out worry.⁶ Spurgeon once said, "Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strength." How true is that? Worry doesn't mean you'll escape your troubles, it just means you'll be unfit to cope with them when they come.

WHAT IF YOUR GREATEST FEARS COME TRUE?

The greatest deliverance Jesus accomplishes for us is saving us from our greatest danger - God's holy and just wrath toward our sin. For most of us, this isn't the felt fear that plagues us each day. But this tells us something about just how disordered our fears can be. Trusting God doesn't mean that our worst fears won't happen. Rather, it means that what we should fear most won't happen. Because Jesus stood in my place on Calvary's cross, because He bore the wrath reserved for me, Because He died and rose again, and because He, this very moment, stands in heaven

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 228-229.

⁵ R.T. Kendall, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis, MN: Chosen Books, 2001), 323.

⁶ Jim Elliff, *The Sufficiency of Daily Grace*, Christian Communicators Worldwide.

interceding on my behalf (cf. Romans 8:34), what should be my greatest fear, the wrath of God, is relieved. Paul wrote, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” Romans 8:35-39.⁷

On the cross, Jesus calmed the only storm that could truly sink us – the storm of God’s wrath and judgment. If Jesus settled that storm, He, the God-man, can be trusted to handle every other temporal storm we may encounter. To voyage with Jesus is to voyage in peace even in the midst of the storm. What worry and anxiety do you need to bring to the cross? What idols have you been trying to protect? What God-given responsibilities have you been neglecting because of fear and worry? Bring them with confidence to the throne of grace, there you will find mercy and grace to help in your time of need.

CLOSING BENEDICTION

As we bring our corporate worship to a close, hear this benediction from God spoken through the Prophet Isaiah, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” Isaiah 41:10. And all God’s people said, “AMEN”! Go in peace!

⁷ Excellent article: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-if-my-worst-fears-come-true>