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Do not Fear! Do not be Anxious! Don't Worry!

Matthew 6:25-34

We've all heard in recent days how fear, anxiety, and worry are more widespread than the coronavirus, and can do as much damage to the human soul as the virus can do to the body. Sadly, there are far too many in the body of Christ who have lost sight of the goodness and greatness of God and have yielded their hearts to the corrosive and unproductive presence of worry. The dominant question in their hearts is: "Who's going to take care of me in a world filled with so much disease and danger?"

If there is one positive thing in this it is knowing that even the men and women who walked with Jesus in the first century were asking the same question. Jesus knew that, and that is why he said what he did in Matthew 6:25-34.

Not everyone listening to this message is going to hear and respond to what I have to say in the same way. I love the way D. A. Carson explains this in his short book on the Sermon on the Mount. He asks us to picture or envision three different kinds of people.

The first is the happy-go-lucky, overly cheerful, almost irresponsible Pollyanna who hardly worries about the next five minutes, let alone tomorrow or next year. Life is a lark. This person doesn't take anything seriously. It's hard to get him to commit or work at anything with any degree of intensity. Most of life's struggles bounce off him with little effect, and he's probably even less concerned with your problems than he is with his own.

The second person is at the absolute opposite end of the spectrum. This guy worries about everything. He is hyper-responsible and takes very personally every problem and burden of every other person that he knows. If it's not the economy, it's the weather; if it's not the weather, it's the government; if it's not the government, it's not only his bad health but that of everyone else. He's riddled with anxiety not only about lunch today but about how he is going to be able to survive after retirement some 35 years down the road!

Our third person is somewhere in between, a solid, sane, balanced believer known for her integrity, hard work, and commitment to her family. Married with three young children, she home-schools the kids and keeps a relatively clean house. She's got friends and everyone loves to have her around. Then one night she wakes up to discover that her husband is paralyzed on his right side and can't speak. The diagnosis is a brain tumor which, at best, will leave him incapacitated and unable to work, and, at worst, will kill him in a year or two.

Each of these three will hear what Jesus says in this passage differently. The first guy will shout “Amen” repeatedly, thinking that our Lord’s rebuke of anxiety and worry reinforces his carefree and irresponsible approach to life. The second will probably feel rebuked by what Jesus says. He’ll leave under a weight of guilt, just one more burden to add to the countless oppressive concerns under which he’s already weighed down. The third may respond with a measure of relief and encouragement, or perhaps will sneer under her breath something to the effect that the preacher should watch his own spouse suffer and die before venturing out to say anything about whether or not we are justified to worry as we do.

So I realize that not everyone will like or agree with or respond in the same manner as others do. All I can say is that I hope you will hear not only in the words of Jesus but behind and beneath them the profoundly passionate love and concern he has for you and the commitment that he makes to you.

Let me begin by first taking note of the *context* in which our Lord’s teaching is found, and then clear up a few *misconceptions* that must be avoided.

First, note that v. 25 begins with the word “therefore.” I’m sure you remember the rule: always ask what the word “therefore” is there for! It is there to draw our attention back to vv. 19-24 where Jesus has just addressed the danger of laying up for ourselves treasures on earth; he has just warned us about the dangers of hoarding wealth and being overly concerned with it. Jesus is speaking to both the rich and to the poor. To the rich, who are inclined to trust in their wealth, he says: “Don’t lay up treasures on earth but rather treasures in heaven.” To the poor, who are inclined to worry about the lack of wealth, he says: “Trust God to make provision for all that you need.”

Satan’s subtlety is stunning. He doesn’t care whether you are obsessed with money because you have a lot of it or are worried about money because you have little. His only concern is that wealth takes your mind and heart off God.

Second, a few misconceptions need to be addressed. For example, in telling us not to worry about the future he is not telling us not to plan for it. Prudent provision for the future is good and right; wearing, corrosive, self-tormenting anxiety about it is not. Again, Jesus is not forbidding justified concern for matters of great importance. He is denouncing unjustified anxiety regarding matters over which we have no control, matters regarding which God has promised to provide. Another misconception is that when Jesus forbids worry about daily provisions that he’s undermining the human responsibility to work. Martin Luther said it best:

“God . . . wants nothing to do with the lazy, gluttonous bellies who are neither concerned nor busy; they act as if they just had to sit and wait for him to drop a roasted goose into their mouth!”

As we’ll see in a moment in v. 26, God provides for birds not by dropping worms from the sky but by providing for them in nature what is necessary for them to feed themselves. One more misconception that

needs to be addressed is the mistaken conclusion that this passage forbids us from taking care of other Christians who are in need. The fact that God providentially provides for the needs of his children does not free us from the responsibility of being the means whereby he does it! He tells us not to be concerned for ourselves, but not that we should lack concern for others. He may be anti-selfish, but he's not anti-social.

So what does Jesus have to say to those riddled with anxiety and worry and doubt, people who are spiritually and emotionally paralyzed for fear of what comes next? He gives us 8 reasons not to worry.

(1) Worry is unlawful (v. 24). To see this point, we have to go back into vv. 19-24. In brief, worry is a violation of the first commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me!" *Worry is idolatry!* When you worry you become a slave to whatever it is that you fear. Instead of looking to God for joy and peace you look to the resolution of whatever problem has provoked fear in your heart. Anxiety is thus an idolatrous dependence on something other than God. To worry is to serve and subject yourself to this world rather than God. Worry is when some issue or problem or concern or need shoves God off the throne of your heart and assumes an all-consuming and controlling influence in your life. That's the point of Jesus in v. 24 when he says you can't serve both God and money.

(2) Worry is unreasonable (v. 25b). Your life is more important than the food and drink that sustain it. Your body is more important than the clothes which cover it. What you wear and eat are of very small importance in comparison with who you are. Our Lord's point here is that if God takes care of the greater thing, namely you and your life, can he not be trusted to take care of the lesser thing, namely your food and clothing?

Although not explicitly mentioned in the text, worry is also unreasonable because it forces us to experience the problem twice. We face it once in our minds as we live fearfully in anticipation of the trouble ahead, and we face it yet a second time when the difficult actually occurs. Worry doubles our trouble! If our fear does not materialize, we have worried once for nothing. If it does materialize, we have worried twice instead of once. On either alternative, worry is unreasonable.

(3) Worry is unworthy (v. 26). What I mean is that worry is unworthy of those who are God's children, created in his image, redeemed by the blood of Christ, forever forgiven and justified by faith. Birds are not created in the image of God. Birds are not adopted into the family of God. Birds are not predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. Listen to them. Every time you hear them sing you should be reminded that God cares for them; he provides for them. And "are you not of more value than they?" (v. 26b).

(4) Worry is unproductive (v. 27). It accomplishes nothing! No one by living in constant anxiety is going to add to the length of his/her life. If anything, worry only shortens and saddens your life. It produces nothing of real and lasting benefit. Worry simply doesn't work!

Consider this. After worrying incessantly about something over which you have no ultimate control, do you look in the mirror and marvel at how your formerly gray hair has returned to its original color? Do you rejoice that all your wrinkles have disappeared and your once sagging skin is now tight and youthful looking? No. Worry adds nothing to your life. If anything, it will only ruin it.

(5) *Worry is unbelief (vv. 28-30).* I use the word “unbelief” here because of the way v. 30 concludes. Jesus rebukes those who worry with the words, “*O you of little faith!*” But why do worry and anxiety reveal a lack of faith? A lack of faith in what? The goodness and power of God! Worry is our way of saying, “God, I don’t believe you really care that much about me and my needs. And even if you do care, I don’t have much confidence in your ability to do anything about it.”

What Jesus is telling us is that the root cause of anxiety is a failure to trust all that God has provided for us in Jesus.

We tend to use anything that doesn’t go our way as an argument against God’s existence. Or if we still believe he exists, we use it to justify our doubt in his goodness. Do you remember the devotional book for teenagers that came out years ago: *If God loves me, why can’t I get my locker open?* With adults it’s usually something more severe and unsettling than a stuck door on a locker at school! But whatever the nature or extent of our problem, we are prone to doubt God’s goodness or his power when things start falling apart.

At the bottom of anxiety is a lack of faith in divine sovereignty. But remember: the fact that God is ever and always in control does not mean you will always feel that he is. God is sovereign, but often his sovereignty is silent and secret.

Why does Jesus speak so forcefully to us, in charging us with having so little faith? The reason is the force of the arguments that are found in vv. 28-30. This is what is known as arguing *from the lesser to the greater*. The reverse argument, *from the greater to the lesser*, is what we find in Romans 8:31-32. Here Jesus points to the lilies of the field and the expanse of grass and rolling meadows. Look at how beautiful they are. Look at how God has adorned them. And yet they are but temporary. Here today, gone tomorrow. Beautiful today, burned up tomorrow.

Don’t you think you matter more to God than inert dirt and unthinking flowers and unfeeling lilies? But if God clothes them, will he not surely clothe you? If he has such concern for that which is less, will he not even more show his concern for that which is more?

(6) *Worry is unchristian (vv. 31-32).* By “Gentiles” Jesus means unbelievers, non-Christians. The spirit of worry and anxiety is a mindset alien to the kingdom of God and to his children. It lowers the believer to the standards and motivation of the lost. I can understand why an unbeliever should worry. In fact, they don’t worry nearly enough!

But for a Christian to worry, for a child of God to be riddled with anxiety, is in effect saying that redemption by the blood of Christ and justification by faith and adoption into God's family and eternal forgiveness make no difference whatsoever in how I face life and confront my problems.

Notice Jesus' emphasis on God as our "**heavenly Father,**" first in v. 26 and now again in v. 32. God relates to you in a way altogether different from how he relates to non-believers. *To live under the weight of anxiety and fear and doubt and excessive concern is to act as if you were a spiritual orphan.* It's certainly not high poetry, but this makes the point:

"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.'"

(7) Worry is unnecessary (v. 32). It is unnecessary because God knows what you need. He knows everything about you. Thus *worry is a tacit denial of the omniscience of God!* We think that by worrying we will bring to God's attention something of which he was unaware. Perhaps if we only complain loudly enough or cry enough we will raise the roof of heaven and awaken God from his slumber of indifference. No! He knows!

(8) Worry is unrighteous (v. 33). The alternative to worry and anxiety is seeking God's kingdom and his righteousness. You can't do both. Jesus portrays these two options as mutually exclusive. Either you worry and slight his righteousness, or you pursue his righteousness and give no room to anxiety.

Think of the time, money, emotional energy, etc. you spend when worrying, time, money, and emotional energy that could have been devoted to cause of God's kingdom. Think of the variety of sins that worry provokes in your heart. Piper explains:

"Anxiety about finances can give rise to coveting and greed and hoarding and stealing. Anxiety about succeeding at some task can make you irritable and abrupt and surly. Anxiety about relationships can make you withdrawn and indifferent and uncaring about other people. Anxiety

about how someone will respond to you can make you cover over the truth and lie about things” (Future Grace, 53).

Before leaving v. 33, two more comments are in order. First, Jesus promises us the “necessities” of life, not its luxuries. Of course, when compared with how most Christians live around the world, our bare necessities would constitute for them a grand luxury. Second, there is an exception to v. 33, and that is when God calls on certain Christians to suffer for righteousness sake in terms of persecution, imprisonment, and eventual martyrdom.

So, what does the Bible recommend in the place of anxiety and worry?

(1) Know well the previous eight points!

(2) Become preoccupied with kingdom-seeking! Evangelization, service to others, ministry to the people of God, deeds of mercy to those most in need, meditation and memorization of Scripture. Stay busy in the service of Christ!

(3) Redirect the focus of your life and your thoughts from tomorrow to today. This is the point of Jesus in v. 34. You can handle today’s problems because they are already here. There is enough to deal with right now, so don’t complicate matters by obsessing with what tomorrow or next month might bring.

(4) Fight anxiety with the promises of God! Fight worry with a massive counter-attack of truth!

If you worry about what people might do or say about you, remember Romans 8:31 – “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

If you worry about being too weak, remember 2 Corinthians 12:9 – “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”

If you worry about future decisions, remember Psalm 32:8 – “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.”

If you worry about God failing to fulfill his promises to you, remember Hebrews 6:18 – “It is impossible for God to lie.”

If you worry about the needs of loved ones and family members, remember Matthew 7:11 – “how much more will the Father give what is good to those who ask.”

If you worry about lingering sickness, remember Psalm 103:3 – “He heals all your diseases.”

If you worry about getting old, remember Isaiah 46:4 – “even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.”

If you worry about failing and falling in your Christian walk, remember Phil. 1:6 – “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

If you worry about God’s presence and his purpose in your life, remember Isaiah 41:10 – “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 victorious right hand.”

(5) Pray! Phil. 4:4-7. This is not a promise that problems will vanish. It is a promise that God will enable you to face them without destructive and debilitating anxiety. Jesus never said that we aren’t to worry because the problems aren’t real or will magically disappear in the presence of faith.

(6) Remind yourself often of the steadfast faithfulness of God.

“Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him.’ The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD” (Lamentations 3:19-26).

(7) Relinquish! Yield control and concern to God, for he cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you” (Ps. 56:3).