

## **“Look At the Birds Of the Air”**

I read an article this week by a woman who worried so much when she was a child that her parents called her Worrywort. They bought her a stuffed toy they also named Worrywort. She said that didn't help much. She grew up to become a developmental psychologist who helps adults and children deal with worry and other struggles. She said some interesting things. Here are four of them

1<sup>st</sup> People who understand and manage their feelings (*like worry*) are happier, have better relationships and do better in school. I imagine with that would apply to most other work as well.

2<sup>nd</sup> We may feel like there is nothing we can do about worry but our worry is more optional than we think. She says, there are things we *can* do to deal with worry and the suffering it causes.

3<sup>rd</sup> Worry doesn't have to be part of who we are. It is something that comes to us like an unwelcome visitor: “It doesn't ask if it can enter. It just barges in. And it will stay as long as you let it.”

4<sup>th</sup> The first step in managing worry is recognizing it. She says we name it to tame it. Then, speaking especially to children, although the words apply to all of us she defines it like this: “*A worry is a thought that stops you from having fun, from feeling good, from being happy.*” “*Anyone can have a worry. You can feel tired from a worry. Or sad. Or sick. A worry can feel like a heavy sack is on your back. Only it isn't there.*”<sup>1</sup>

This week, as we continue to look at the classic sayings of Jesus we come to one in which he helps us all with our worries. In his famous Sermon on the Mount, with all the other things he talks about worry is taken seriously. It is to help us better handle the worries of life that Jesus tell us to look at the birds of the air. There's something light-hearted about the life of the birds and the flowers. And yet, all the Pretty pictures of carefree birds and happy lilies can't hide the fact that Jesus is talking about something important that we need to take to heart and consider. What Jesus is teaching all has to be transposed into the world of potential hurricanes, pandemics and politics too. In every season and at every stage of life there's plenty to worry about.

*Because of that I want to begin by stressing that ...*

## I. JESUS IS A TRUSTWORTHY GUIDE TO A BETTER LIFE.

**Verse 25**, begins with the words, *therefore I tell you, do not worry*. The *therefore*, links what he is about to tell us about worry to what he's been teaching and especially to the idea that we are called to live a God-centered life of faith. The "*I tell you*" firmly rests what follows on his own authority. If you were to read on to the end of the Sermon on the Mount you would discover at the end, **Matthew 7:28-29**, the people were astonished at the *authority* with which Jesus spoke and taught. Jesus speaks with authority about a life of faith.

If Jesus were just a misty-eyed hippie we might roll our eyes and dismiss him as unrealistic. But he is not that! His life on earth was not a carefree escape from the concerns of life. He bravely faced a world filled with the suffering of the innocent and, too often, governed by the uncaring. He dealt with the Pharisees who were sort of arrogant Bible-thumping religious bigots who looked good on the outside but were full of hypocrisy on the inside. He dealt with the pathetically broken lives of cynical streetwalkers, violent criminals and the desperately poor and sick. He didn't come to escape it. He waded right into it all and in the end took all the suffering of sin on his own shoulders to be our savior.

*But have you ever noticed what a basically happy person Jesus was?* I read this week where one of the most well known Bible Scholars today, N.T. Wright, had written about the happiness of Jesus. He said:

Oh yes, we know that according to the prophecies, he was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." We know... he wept at the tomb of Lazarus and was sad when people refused to trust God and see the wonderful things he was doing.

But these are the exceptions, the dark patches painted on to the bright background. He had watched the birds wheeling around, high up on the currents of air in the Galilean hills simply enjoying being alive. He had watched a thousand different kinds of flowers growing in the fertile Galilean soil... it was just itself: glorious, God-given, beautiful. Jesus had a strong, lively sense of the goodness of his father, the creator of the world.... when he told his followers not to worry about tomorrow, we must assume he led them by example. He seemed to have the skill of living totally in the present, giving attention totally to the present task, celebrating the goodness of God here and now. If that's not a recipe for happiness, I don't know what is. (N.T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone*, p. 65-66)

*You see, Jesus wanted his followers to live the way he lived. That's what we see in passages like this. So we have to pay attention as...*

## **II. JESUS SAYS DO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR LIFE.**

This is one of the most difficult things Jesus says here but it is also one of the clearest things he says. In **verse 25** Jesus said to his disciples: <sup>25</sup> *“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? He talks about worry in **verse 27, 28, and 31** and again in **verse 34** He says, *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.**

### **A. Don't worry doesn't mean don't care about or do anything.**

**Jesus is not saying you shouldn't care about the people you love.**

He is saying that you aren't going to help people you love if you let worry get the best of you and you try to work out of fear and not faith.

**Jesus is not saying you shouldn't work hard and plan well.** He is saying; “While you work, care and face troubles and uncertainties hold onto the peace that comes from faith and gives you greater power in your caring, clarity in your thinking and energy for your working.”

When you play a guitar, a violin or any stringed instrument there is a point at which a particular string is *in tune*. If it is too loose it is flat and cannot make the music it was intended to make. If it is wound up too tight it is sharp and the music will be too shrill to be beautiful. God doesn't want our hearts to be so apathetic and indifferent that we are flat, but He doesn't want us so wound up we are sharp and close to snapping. He wants us in tune. So we have to ask ourselves: Is my heart in tune?

### **B. To take Jesus seriously we have to look at ourselves honestly.**

*How can you tell the difference between healthy concern and unhealthy worry? One way is to look at emotions and temptations*

**1. Look at your emotions. Proverbs 12:25** says, *An anxious heart weighs a man down.* One of the ways to recognize unhealthy worry is that healthy concern motivates you toward productive efforts but worry weighs you down. *If instead of fueling your best efforts your concerns leave you brittle and bitter, drained of compassion, fragile, angry or impatient... that's worry and it's wrong.*

**2. Look at your temptations. Proverbs 29:25** *The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.* The fear of man is a particular kind of worry. It lays a trap that catches you in temptation. *If your fears and concerns are setting you up to cave in to temptation so that you are more vulnerable to disobedience and more liable to act out to control your life or to get what you want that is worry and wrong.* Can you envision a way of life that is not naive or indifferent but isn't anxious or either? Can you picture a life in which you do what you can with what you've got and as you do you pray and rely on God and obey him as you trust him for the outcomes? That's the life to which Jesus calls you when He says, "do not worry about your life."

*Now of course he is not only saying, "do not worry",*

### **III. JESUS IS ULTIMATELY TELLING US TO TRUST IN GOD.**

This is what really takes us into the heart of Jesus' teaching here. We will not be free to follow Christ unless we deepen our trust in God.

**A. To trust in God we have to think with faith about God's care.** *Jesus gives you two things to think about to build trust in God. First,*

**1<sup>st</sup> . Think About Your Value To God. Verse 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?* All human beings have dignity and great value. Why? First of all because we are *all* created in the image of God. Faithful Christians are both pro-life *and* anti-racist because all human beings are valuable. Here's something else. No matter how messed up and broken you are the moment you turn to Christ and trust in him as your Savior you become a child of God. He died as a sacrifice to pay for our sins. He rose again as our Lord and Savior. As a Christian you have tremendous value to God not only because he made you but also because he's saved you. Of course you need to ask, has he saved you? Have you come to him and asked him? You definitely do *not* become a treasured possession to God because of some good you do in this world. It's all grace, totally free and undeserved. You have to receive him and trust in him. Then you can know you are valuable because of creation and redemption and also predestination. When you trust in Jesus one of the things you come to cherish is this: God choose you in Christ before the foundations of the world. Before the first birds sang their first song! Before the first flower pushed its way up through moist soil to bring a smile to God! You were in the mind and heart of God. *Think about your value to Him and know He cares for you.*

*Think about your value to God, Second*

**2<sup>nd</sup>** . **Think about what worry won't do and what God will do.** *Worry won't do anything for you. Verse 27 Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? God on the other hand cares for you. Verse 28-30 Jesus says: <sup>28</sup> "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> 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?*

When Jesus talks about God feeding the birds and clothing the lilies can caring for us he's describing the Providence of God. Providence is God actively sovereignly at work in this world to do his will and care for his people. The *Heidelberg Catechism*, written in 1563 talks about the providence of God. *It says:*

Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which he upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty--all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but from his fatherly hand.

The only way to overcome worry is through faith in the Father. The conclusion in **verse 30**, is that if God cares for the flowers, *will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?* We have little faith when we are so afraid of what God *won't* do that we lose the wonder of what God has promised *He will do*. God's promises include both this life and the life to come. He has given us great promises, and has shown us his promise keeping love in Jesus so we can live by faith.

I love these words E. Stanley Jones wrote. He said,

I am inwardly fashioned for faith and not for fear. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life; faith is oil. I live better by faith and confidence than by fear and doubt and anxiety. In anxiety and worry my being is gasping for breath . . . these are not my native air. We are inwardly constructed in nerve and tissue and brain cell and soul, for faith and not for fear. God made us that way. Therefore, the need of faith is not something imposed on us dogmatically, but it is written in us intrinsically. We cannot live without it. To live by worry is to live against reality.

To trust in God you have to think with faith about God the father and  
**B. To trust in God you have to set your heart on God's kingdom.**

Jesus adds this point in **verses 33-34**, He says, *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

The kingdom of God is present now when the healing grace of God rules in our hearts, churches and communities, it will be present in its fullness at the end of history when God rules over all things and renews the whole world. Jesus says the Father gives us substantial healing by his grace in our hearts and a sweet taste of the kingdom to come wherever he rules even now and, for the future and for eternity This gift of the kingdom is a part of the music of the gospel. It is the great gift of God's love and grace for you through faith in Christ.

Thinking about this sermon and its imagery of birds and flowers this week I remembered a song that Bob Marley did on his *Exodus* album. The song was called, *Three Little Birds*. In the song he wakes up in the morning with the rising sun and there are three little birds on his doorstep singing sweetly and it seems like their saying: *"Don't worry about a thing, Cause every little thing gonna be all right."* That little song became one of his most popular and even showed up in the apocalyptic movie, *I am Legend*. People love the song because of the sweetness of its message. But what Jesus is saying is for those who believe in and follow him, what you are given is not just a simple song with a sweet sentiment but a solid promise from God the father. It is his pleasure to give you the kingdom so *"Don't worry about a thing, Cause every little thing gonna be all right."*

Jesus is saying in light of the gift of the kingdom, don't set your heart only on this physical, temporary life with all of its uncertainties. There is more to life! Set your heart on God's kingdom. Live for him, and trust in Him. You trust God not only by your dependence on his provision but also by your devotion to his purposes in your life, in your church and in the world. *Where is your heart and what's in it? We aren't all that good at trust. But he calls us to it, just as we are. He calls to Him and to following him. That means he call us to keep growing; not to worry but to trust, to set aside our fears and follow him in faith.*

**Amen.**

## Prayer of Response

Gracious and caring Father, We confess that we are too unbelieving and short-sighted. We so often lack child-like trust in you as our caring father and the eternal perspective that keeps all of life in proper focus. We are stressed, fearful, short with people, and full of grumbles and complaints when our faith is weak. Forgive and renew us to follow Jesus and serve you not as bold and believing disciples. We ask in Jesus name Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> This is from an article/book review by Diana Divecha, PHD, on the web page *Developmental Science* , <https://www.developmentalscience.com/blog/2013/01/30/what-do-children-worry-about-and-how-can-grown-ups-help-2>. I don't know much about Dr. Divecha or the book she is reviewing but thought these observations were interesting and helpful and would help me speak to both children and adults in the introduction to the sermon.