

SERIES: The Good News, as reported by Matthew
 SERMON: **A Sermon for the Ages: The Utter Foolishness of Worry**
 SCRIPTURE: Matthew 6:25-34
 SPEAKER: Michael P. Andrus
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Today I want to speak about one of the most useless, debilitating, and destructive habits a person can possibly engage in, yet one that is so common that I suspect scores in my audience are doing it right this very moment. In fact, I suspect a few are so involved in doing it that they haven't even heard a word I've said so far.

I'm talking about worry. Not concern, not responsibility, not thoughtful analysis, not industriousness, but worry. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus delivers a categorical prohibition to worry, as four different times He tells us, "Don't do it." But what stands out to me in this passage at the end of Matthew 6 is the logical, water-tight reasoning He gives as to *why* we shouldn't worry. Will you listen carefully to words of Jesus, as found in Matthew 6:25-34:

"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 important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 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? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life.

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 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, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

The Dallas Morning News quoted Mickey Rivers, who used to play baseball for the Yankees and the Texas Rangers, with this profound advice:

Ain't no sense worrying about things you got control over, because if you got control over them, ain't no sense worrying. And there ain't no sense worrying about things you got no control over either, because if you got no control over them, ain't no sense worrying.

Now frankly, I can't figure out if the way he put that is profound or silly, but it seems to me to capture the essence of what Jesus is saying to us.

Sadly, the indisputable fact is that worry is an almost universal tendency of the human race, and some people are clearly addicted to it. They worry about everything, and if they can't find something to worry about, they worry about *that*, because something bad must be just around the corner! Unfortunately, worry is one of those addictions that is treated as acceptable in our

Christian culture, probably because it is so common—like pride and jealousy and gossip. You can be a worry wort and still teach a Bible class, or lead worship, or even preach. Nevertheless God’s Word clearly tells us that worry is unreasonable, unnecessary, unrewarding, unfaithful, ungodly, unwise, and, if we’re going to be perfectly honest, it can be downright sinful.

Therefore, I think we need to give careful attention to what our Savior has to say about worry. And as we do so, it is my prayerful hope that every one of us might make a conscious effort to appropriate the victory over worry that is available to us. And I pray that some who are addicted to worry might begin the road to recovery—even today.

I see here in this passage six reasons Jesus offers as to why we should not worry.

1. Worry is unreasonable because it makes mountains out of molehills. (25)

Jesus addresses three issues that were common worry generators in His day: food, drink, and clothing. I suspect He was talking primarily to poor people—those who often did not know where their next meal was coming from, who had to give a good deal of forethought to acquiring water and storing it, and who had little excess clothing.

Now let’s face it, there’s probably no one here this morning who has reason to worry about where his or her next meal is coming from, or water for a shower, or clothes. But isn’t it interesting that even those who have plenty of food, drink, and clothes still worry about these same things—only in different ways.

Let me take clothes, for example. Has any woman here ever stood before a walk-in closet with literally dozens of dresses, skirts, slacks, sweaters, and shoes and said, “I can’t find anything to wear”? Be honest now! Listen to how Jesus talks to us about these kinds of worries: “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food?”

Life is more important than what we eat or drink. Let me try to prove that to you. Talk to someone who has recently lost a family member, especially if the one who died is a child. If you ask them how much time they’ve spent recently thinking about food or drink or clothes, I can almost guarantee they would say, “That stuff doesn’t mean anything to me now. If I could have my daughter back, I’d give up everything I own and eat bread and water for the rest of my life!”

That’s what Jesus means when He says, “Life is more important than what we eat or drink.” Death helps us get our priorities straight and stop elevating mundane issues to critical status. It helps us to quit making mountains out of molehills.

The body is more important than what we put on it. We give so much attention to our bodies. John MacArthur writes,

We pamper the body, decorate it, exercise it, protect it from disease and pain,

*build it up, slender it down, drape it with jewelry, keep it warm or keep it cool, train it to work and to play, help it get to sleep, and a hundred other things to serve and satisfy our bodies.*¹

But it's only when the body itself quits functioning that we fully realize what's really important. Talk to someone with Parkinson's Disease or MS. Ask how important fancy clothes are when he or she has to fight to even make their limbs do what their minds tell them.

Or think back to your last visit to the hospital for surgery. They put this ridiculous hospital garment on you—something you would never be caught dead in anywhere else. But you put up with it. Why? Because you know your health is more important than how you look. Don't sweat the small stuff, Jesus says. Stop worrying about insignificant things and give attention to what really matters, like life and good health.

2. Worry is unnecessary because God is our Father. (26)

Here is Jesus' argument in a nutshell:

God takes care of the birds.

And we His children are much more valuable than birds.

He says in 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." I want you to look at some birds on the screen. Not one of these birds is driving a tractor or a combine. People do that, but birds don't. Not one of these birds warehouses worms for the winter months. People do that, but birds don't. Yet just because birds don't plant or harvest or store up food doesn't mean they go hungry. Why? Because God feeds them.

By the way, *how* does God feed birds? Does He drop worms into their nests? Does He catch fish and lay them out on the beach for the seagulls? Does He put sacks of birdseed out in the forest? No, God feeds them by giving them the instinct and the ability to find food and to participate in the great process He Himself set up, which we call the food chain. But they do not *worry* about where their next meal is going to come from.

Please don't learn the wrong lesson here. Jesus is not telling us to live like birds, *except* in regard to worry. He is not suggesting that we quit planting crops, harvesting, and storing food in barns. Those are the means God has provided for us humans to feed ourselves. Jesus is not forbidding thought, or even forethought; He is only forbidding anxious thought. He is telling us that we don't need to fret and stew and worry about the necessities of life, because the same Father that enables birds to survive in their surroundings and with their instincts will provide for us in ours. In fact, we can be even more sure that God will take care of us than we are that He will take care of the birds. Why? Because we His children are much more valuable than birds.

The leading radicals in the animal rights movement of our day tell us that animals are equal to humans in value. For example, the editors of The Great Ape Project write, "We demand the

extension of the community of equals to include all great apes: human beings, chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans.” They are actually lobbying the United Nations to pass a Declaration on Great Apes to guarantee apes the right to life, liberty, and the freedom from torture. But their concern is not just for the apes. Karen Davis in a recent Washington Post interview compared the slaughter of chickens by KFC to the Holocaust. She described poultry farms as “huge prison camps,” where chickens are humiliated, tortured, and murdered.ⁱⁱ

Now I am an animal lover and I believe animals are a wonderful part of God’s creation. Mankind has a responsibility to treat all of God’s creation with care and dignity. We are supposed to be stewards of the animal kingdom. I’m convinced there will be a wealth of animal life in heaven. To me all this means that animal cruelty is evil and absolutely inexcusable. I don’t even hunt or fish (which is a personal preference of mine, not something I expect of others).

But as valuable as animals are, and as valuable as birds are, they are not as valuable as human beings. Why do I say that? Because Jesus says so: “Are you not much more valuable than they?” We have a heavenly Father, but the animals don’t. Did you notice Jesus’ words: “*Your* heavenly Father feeds them,” not “*their* heavenly Father feeds them.” They have a Creator, but we have a Father. Therefore, if God takes care of the animals, and if we are much more valuable than they, won’t He take care of us? Worry is unnecessary.

Have you heard the little children’s poem?

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.”

Of course, the sparrow had it all wrong; we’re the ones with the heavenly Father who cares, so let’s act like it and quit worrying.

3. Worry is unrewarding (or unproductive) because it can’t make anything better. (27)

Extending life is an absolute obsession to many in our culture. People exercise, eat only health food, supplement their diets with vitamins and minerals, get regular physical checkups, and do countless other things they believe may add to their life spans. Some, like Ted Williams, are even having their bodies frozen in liquid nitrogen, hoping that a cure for what killed them will one day be discovered so they can be resuscitated.

But Jesus asks, “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” On the contrary, you can take years off your life by worrying. Dr. Charles Mayo of Mayo Clinic fame, wrote, “Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands and the whole nervous system. I have never met a man or known a man to die of overwork, but I have known a lot who died of worry.”ⁱⁱⁱ Worry is

unrewarding and unproductive.

4. Worry is unfaithful because it doubts God's character. (28-30)

Jesus has used the birds of the air to illustrate the fact that worry is unnecessary. Now He uses the lilies to illustrate that we are actually faithless when we worry. Jesus probably isn't talking about Easter lilies. The Greek word used here implies flowers of a wide variety. Look at the flowers on the screen. How did they get so beautiful? They didn't work at it. They didn't shop for prettier petals.

God dresses the flowers; He designed them; He gave them their color; He thought up their shape. And when you get right down to it, you have to admit that He did a pretty good job. Here's Jesus' reasoning:

**Flowers dress better than kings.
Yet they are temporal while we are eternal.**

He puts it this way: "I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these." Nothing manmade can ever rival what God has made. I enjoyed seeing Hoover Dam several years ago; it's amazing. But does it hold a candle to the Grand Canyon? Not on your life! Have you seen the Eiffel Tower in Paris? It's an amazing structure, but it's nothing compared to the French Alps. When God dresses nature, He does it up right! Now here's the point, in Jesus' own words: "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, O you of little faith?"

Flowers are like grass in that they are temporary. Most last a few days, some a few weeks, and some even a few months. I think we still have a poinsettia from Christmas, but it's on its last legs. We, however, are eternal! We not only last for days, or weeks, or months, or even years; we last forever. Why do we worry, then, about such things as clothes?

Now I admit, just before Easter is probably a bad time to talk about the sin of worrying about clothes. Some of you ladies will soon be out shopping for a new Easter dress. That's OK—you will only add to the beauty of the day. I'm not in any way criticizing you—unless, of course, you spend your whole week stewing about it, or unless your entire Easter is ruined when another woman across the aisle shows up in the same dress.

The point of the illustration about the flowers is that when we worry we demonstrate a lack of faith in God. One writer put it this way: "You believe that God can redeem you, save you from sin, break the shackles of Satan, take you to heaven where He has prepared a place for you, and keep you for all eternity, and yet you do not trust Him to supply your daily needs?"

5. Worry is ungodly because it mimics pagans and ignores God's providence. (31, 32)

For the third time Jesus says, "Do not worry." Look at verse 31: "So do not worry, saying, 'What

shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.” Let me clarify what Jesus means by “pagans” here. He’s not talking about witch doctors in the jungle or idol worshipers in Asia; he’s using the term “pagans” to simply refer to people who are not God-worshippers—unbelievers, if you will. If you were not a God-worshiper, that is, if you didn’t have a heavenly Father big enough to help you and small enough to care, then worry would be natural and quite understandable.

Unbelievers look at the birds and flowers we saw a few moments ago and comment on the wonders that evolution has produced! I feel sorry for them. Phil Yancey wrote of the atheist, “It is a terrible thing to be grateful and have no one to thank—to be awed and have no one to worship.”^{iv} But we have a Father to thank and to worship, and what a God He is! He knows what we need before we do. The implication is, of course, that we can trust that His knowledge will be translated into provision. Let me ask a simple question: Do you really think we as Christians worry any less than atheists? If not, isn’t that a sad commentary on the level of our faith?

6. Worry is unwise because it overloads our circuits. (34)

I’m going to come back to verse 33, because it’s really the key to the whole passage, but look at the last verse in the chapter: “Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Of course, most of our worry and anxiety *is* about tomorrow. We don’t worry about the past, though we may regret some things about it. We don’t worry about the present, because we’re dealing with it. We worry about what we expect to happen tomorrow. But how much sense does that make? Most worries never materialize. John Stott observes wisely that worrying about trouble doubles it: “For if our fear does not materialize, we have worried once for nothing; if it does materialize, we have worried twice instead of once. In both cases it is foolish: worry doubles trouble.”^v

What worrying about tomorrow does is to overload our circuits and cause emotional meltdown, even spiritual depression. Just think for a moment about the kinds of things we worry about besides the necessities Jesus speaks of—food, drink and clothes. What do adults worry about?

- The stock market
- Terrorism
- Job security
- The weather
- Health, particularly as we get older
- Our kids
- Our elderly parents

Now what possible good does it do to worry about the weather? What can you do about it? Why worry about the stock market? My experience is that if you buy a stock it’s going to go down and if you sell it, it’s going to go up, so why worry about it?

What do children worry about? I asked one of our children’s workers that question, and here are some of the things she hears from our children:

Will God still love me when I'm bad?
 Will my mom and dad get divorced after that argument last night?
 How can I be safe from the bully at school?
 Do other kids think I look ugly?
 Am I smart enough to meet my parents' expectations?

What do teens worry about? One of our youth staff provided this list:

School and grades
 Appearance
 Dating
 Getting a job, making money
 Relationship with parents

Now if I were to summarize and categorize these issues that generate worry, I think I would do it this way:

Life and health
 Safety and protection
 Security and significance
 Value and worth
 Relationships

Friends, please understand that not one of these issues is helped by worry! Actually all of them are important, all deserve consideration and careful thought. But none is aided by anxiety or worry, and if we're not careful they will overload our circuits. If there are new troubles tomorrow, there will be fresh grace to handle them.

Conclusion: In conclusion I want us to zero in on the heart of the matter: **Seek first God's kingdom and righteousness.** (33) The key verse of our passage is verse 33: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." I want to ask three simple questions about this incredibly profound verse:

How important is it to seek God's kingdom and righteousness?
 How do we do it?
 What are the promised results?

How important is it to seek God's kingdom and righteousness? Jesus says to do it "first." That doesn't merely refer to chronology but also to priority. Of all the things we have to do, seeking God's kingdom and righteousness is of first importance. Before we plant, harvest, store, or prepare our food, we should seek God's kingdom and righteousness. Before we go shopping for a new wardrobe, we should seek God's kingdom and righteousness. Before we invest in the stock market or seek medical help or try to find a new job, we should seek God's kingdom and righteousness.

How do we do it? Seeking God's kingdom and righteousness means, first of all, making sure we are citizens in His Kingdom. Not every human being is, you know. God is our Father but not everyone is His child. Jesus Himself said that some (even some religious people) have the Devil as their father and are part of Satan's Kingdom, not God's Kingdom. Well, how do you get a passport to God's Kingdom? The Bible says we must humble ourselves, repent, believe in

Jesus and be born again. Here's how the Scripture states it very succinctly– “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!”

Once you know you're a citizen, seeking His kingdom is tantamount to honoring and obeying the King. You see, we not only need to seek God's Kingdom but also His righteousness. He expects obedience from us; He expects us to keep the Great Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.” He expects us to keep the Great Commission: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” We don't earn salvation by keeping these commandments, but we demonstrate our relationship with Him by keeping them.

We also seek His kingdom and righteousness when we pursue intimacy with the King through prayer and Bible Study and meditation and fellowship.

What are the promised results when we seek first God's kingdom and righteousness? In other words, when Jesus says, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well,” what “*things*” is he talking about? Well, it seems to me He must be talking about the things He has just mentioned—food, drink, clothes. I think that's also true of the other things we so often worry about:

- Life and health
- Safety and protection
- Security and significance
- Value and worth
- Relationships

But is this promise an iron-clad guarantee—that if we seek God we will enjoy long life and good health? Is Jesus saying that if you seek God first, no terrorist can strike your family, your stock picks are all going to be winners, and you will never have cancer? No, for there are many other Scriptures that make it clear through both example and teaching that we live in a fallen world. Furthermore, God uses tragedy and illness and even poverty at times to teach us things we might never learn otherwise. Remember what Jesus said about the sparrows? “Not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will.” But sparrows *do* fall to the ground and get killed. His promise was not that they would not fall, but that this would not happen without God's knowledge and consent.

So also for God's children. Our freedom from anxiety is not due to some guarantee that we will not experience trouble or tragedy, but rather due to the confidence we have that God is our loving Father and will treat us lovingly as His children.

i. John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 421.

ii. Charles Colson, *Breakpoint* #91201, December 1, 1999.

iii. MacArthur, 423.

iv. Phil Yancey, *Open Windows*

v. John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture*, 169.