

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

Some years ago an 85 year-old woman was asked what she would do different if she could live her life all over again. She said: “If I had my life to live over, I would relax and ramble around and do sillier things. I would take fewer things so seriously, and I would take more chances and take greater risks. I would take more holidays and I would climb more mountains and swim more rivers. I would eat more ice cream and less prunes. I would perhaps have some actual troubles – but I’m sure I would have fewer imaginary ones. You see, I’m one of those people who have lived sensibly and safely, hour after hour, day after day. Oh, I have had my moments. And if I had it all to do over again I would have more of those moments, more moments of challenge and of uncertainty, one after another, instead of living safely for so many years in my big comfortable chair, acting like all those people who never go anywhere without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, a raincoat, or a parachute. If I had it to do over again I would laugh more and I would pick more daisies – and *I would worry a lot less.*”

It has been said that worry is fear's extravagance. Worry extracts interest on trouble before it comes due. Worry constantly drains the energy God gives us to face our daily problems, energy that could be used to fulfill our many and varied responsibilities. Worry pulls tomorrow's cloud over today's sunshine, and wastes today's time by cluttering up tomorrow's opportunities with yesterday's problems. Worry gives a small thing a big shadow. Near the end of his life, Mark Twain said, “I am an old man and have known a great many troubles – and most of them never happened.” The English word *worry* comes from an old German word “wurgen” which means “to strangle or to choke.” That is what worry does. Worry is emotional, spiritual, and physical strangulation. Studies reveal that the stress of worry causes more mental and physical afflictions than we would ever want to admit. There is a Peanuts cartoon that shows Linus walking up to Charlie Brown and saying: "You look kinda depressed." Charlie Brown replies: "I worry about school a lot." Then he adds, "I worry about my worrying so much about school." And in the last panel we see Charlie and Linus sitting on a log together, with Charlie makes his final observation. He says: "Even my anxieties have anxieties!".

In the fallen world we live in, worry and stress is a way of life. The reality is we are surrounded by and filled with worry and anxiety about way too many things. A Worth/Roper survey a few years ago found that among the things that produce anxiety in North Americans are speaking in public; being diagnosed with cancer; not having enough money to live on after retirement; having major surgery or dental work; having your income taxes audited; being outdoors alone at night; getting fat; being pulled over for speeding; having a credit card declined in public; and using a computer. I am sure we all could add to that list, because just like Charlie Brown oftentimes our anxieties do have anxieties. Worry often feels that the fishing boat that sank some years ago in the rough, cold winter waters off Vancouver Island, when two men in a life raft were tied to their sinking boat by a nylon rope. Neither had a knife to cut the rope, and so the two men alternated chewing on the rope with their teeth - and minutes before the ship sank they finally chewed through the rope and survived. That's worry!

Of course, we're not the first people to experience worry and stress and anxiety, although we might think we have more things to worry about than ever before. And sadly, that very well might be true. Anxiety, however, has been around for a long time; it's has been afflicting us for centuries. In Jesus' day, worry and anxiety was everywhere, just as it is today. The people who stood and sat before Jesus as he delivered his message on the Sermon on the Mount were no different than you and I. They had to deal with the problems of making a living, feeding their families, raising their children, paying their taxes, dealing with health problems and just working out the issues of living life just like we all do.

Today, as we continue to walk through the Sermon on the Mount, we continue to look at Matthew 6 where Jesus spoke of what true "*righteousness*" looks like in those who are truly following him on the path that leads to the Kingdom of God. Jesus blazed that path for us by sacrificing his life on a cross in our place, for the forgiveness of our sins, so we might find our way back home to God. But Jesus not only leads us as our perfect sacrifice, he also is with us as our perfect righteousness – so that he might lead us into the transformation of our hearts and minds and souls, which will reflect the character of the perfection of righteousness of the Kingdom of God. What Jesus has been telling us is that if we are truly a people of the kingdom of God, our lives will have a transformational effect on our culture and society because righteous Kingdom conduct flows out of righteous Kingdom character.

In Matthew 6:1-18 Jesus told us that our kingdom righteousness will be measured by how much we value the opinion of God over the opinion of man. Last week, in Matthew 6:19-24, Jesus told us that our kingdom righteousness will be measured by *how much we value God more than we value the things of this world*. This morning, in Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus continues to tell us that our kingdom righteousness will be measured by *how much we value God more than we value the things of this world* - by addressing the idolatry of worry/anxiety in our struggles with *valuing God more than we value the things of this world*. We probably don't think of anxiety as a form of idolatry, but it is idolatry when we allow anxiety to take our eyes off of Jesus. At the very foundation of our faith, followers of Jesus Christ *should not* be struggling with worry and anxiety *about the things of the world we live in* because Jesus is God, and Jesus reigns and rules as God, which means Jesus reigns and rules over every intent of every action of every event that happens on every square inch of everything in the entire universe.

But, at the very foundation of *the experience* of our faith, followers of Jesus Christ *do* struggle with worry and anxiety about the things of the world we live in *because* - while our souls have been saved by God through Jesus Christ - the things about us that are of the world, things like our hearts and our minds and our emotions and our bodies, are still tainted and warped and infected with the sinful nature that was passed down to us from our rebellion in the Garden of Eden - which continues to taint, warp and infect what we think, say and do - and does the same to everything in the world we live in.

The aim of the "*righteousness*" of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ in our lives is to not only glorify God in everything we think, say and do - but also to glorify God by freeing us from our fallen, sinful bondage to worry and anxiety. The roots of worry and anxiety are planted and grow in the soil of fear - *because* we, as saved sinners who live in a fallen sinful world, will have more than our share of fearful experiences. But where the bondage to the idolatry of worry and anxiety from those experiences comes from, is that when we *substitute fear in the place of putting our trust in God* – the focus of our hearts, minds, emotions and bodies will turn towards ourselves and our own efforts to control the fearful situations and circumstances that we find ourselves in. The truth is, we do live in a hard, harsh, violent, dangerous, fallen world - and the fear of worry and anxiety can and will cause us to usurp the sovereignty of God's omnipotent control and claim it as our own. The key to defeating the fear of anxiety is found toward the end of our text in Matthew 6:33: "*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*" In other words, when we begin to think about our experiences or our basic needs or our struggles and our circumstances or our situations or our pasts or our futures – we don't need to fear or worry, *because* when we "*seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness*" God Himself, as Jesus Christ, is reigning and ruling over "*all*" those "*things.*"

In our text for this morning Jesus tells us - just as he told those who stood and sat before him - how we all are to deal with the issues of worry and anxiety. Three times he says: "*Therefore . . . do not be anxious*" (Matthew 6: 25, 31, 34). The word "*Therefore*" points us back to the statements Jesus made in the preceding text, the words that we looked at in last week's sermon, where Jesus challenged us to consider what we treasure in life, saying, "*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Matthew 6:19-21). In these words Jesus addressed the question "Where is your greatest treasure?" by asking us "Where is your heart with God" - *because* there is a plethora of treasures in this world vying to be the treasure of our hearts. Last week we heard Jesus confront us with the truth that the treasures of money, possessions, time and position are fatal substitutes for God: "*No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.*"

Here Jesus told us that it is impossible to treasure God and the things of the world at the same time. We cannot serve ourselves and God. If Jesus is our greatest treasure, then he is our only Master. But if we look at the things of the world for our comfort, security, fulfillment and success - rather than the worth and value of what we already have in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ - we will be "*devoted*" to the comfort, security, fulfillment and success of the world; and we will "*despise*" (spurn, neglect, reject) the worth and value of the comfort and security and fulfillment and success we have graciously been given in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

In our text for today we read that while we *can* value the money, possessions, time, position, comfort, security, fulfillment and success of the world *too much* - we can also *fear the loss* of all those things *too much*. We can grow anxious when all of "*these things*" of the world appear to be disappearing, and especially so when they do disappear altogether. Both treasuring money, possessions, time, position, comfort, security, fulfillment and success of the world - and fearing the loss of any of "*these things*" takes into account the depth of what it means to treasure our most sovereign God, as the greatest, most valuable, worthy, glorious, eternal treasure that our hearts could ever know. Three times Jesus puts an exclamation mark on the statement that God is to be the greatest treasure we could ever possess in all of life when he flatly says, "*Therefore . . . do not be anxious.*" And three times Jesus then tells us the reasons why it is futile to fearfully worry or have anxiety about anything in life.

1) We should not worry or be anxious because there is more to life than the basic things we need to live in this world. "*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?"* (Matthew 6:25-30). Jesus speaks here of people being anxious over food, clothing, and length of their lives - and then he reminds us that that life is more than food and clothing and time. In other words, fear, worry and anxiety are futile because life is more than things. Life is more than just about what we eat, what we wear and how healthy we are/how long we will live. Life is of a mysterious, eternal fabric that is far beyond our flesh. We need to think about this. The truth is if you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of the people in the world. If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy. If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than a million people in this world who will not survive this week or the 105 people that die in the next minute. If you have never experienced the danger of war, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 500 million people in the world. If you can attend church without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are more blessed than three billion in the world.

We must not, brothers and sisters, measure life in terms of what surrounds us. Money, food, clothing, and health are deceptive in nature. They may appear to have lasting value and worth, but they are by nature temporary; in a moment they could be gone. There are greater things than food, clothing and health - things such as love, forgiveness, grace, family – but most of all, God. *Life is not about what we have in this world, but about who lives in our hearts.* God gave us life so we might enjoy Him in this life and enjoy him forever in the life beyond this life. And while we are more valuable than birds, they can teach us something about the life God has given us. They always go about their work as though the sun will come up tomorrow because regardless of that happens, God will still be God. Anxiety or worry about what *could* happen will not only *not* change what *will* happen - but will make you miserable while you wait for God to be God. God delights in making all things beautiful, even when it doesn't seem like it. There will be a day when we have finished carrying our crosses, that Jesus will put kingly robes on us, and on that day Jesus will say: *"I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."* We should not worry or be anxious because life with Jesus is more than life in this world.

2) We should also not worry or be anxious because we have a heavenly Father who will provide for us. *"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"* (Matthew 6:31-33). Jesus points out that the birds and the flowers are both fed and clothed by our *"heavenly Father"* and they don't worry about such things - and so then neither should we. We don't see birds flying around wringing their wings over whether or not they are going to find a worm – and we don't see lilies bent over with stress-induced petals in concern over whether it will rain or not. God takes care of them. Jesus tells us that we are worth much more than birds or flowers, so quit worrying.

There is a story that is told about two stores that were across the street from one another, and both were highly competitive, always trying to get ahead of the other. The manager of one store came out one day and nailed a great big sign over the front of his store that said, "If you want it, we have it." Well the manager from the other store walked out and saw that sign and thought about it for a few moments, went back into his store, and awhile later came out with a sign he nailed over his store that said, "If we don't have it, you don't need it." This is true for all of us. If you and I don't have something we want, regardless of what it is - it's because at this point in our lives God knows that we truly just don't need it. While that might not set well in our entitlement-minded culture, that's how God works. If we are going to conquer worry, we must come to the realization that God deeply and dearly loves us - and He will take care of us. If you and I really believed that our *"heavenly Father"* is loving and sovereign, then we would trust Him to *not so much* meet our desires and wants – but every one of our needs. We need not worry or be anxious - our heavenly Father will *always* provide for us.

3) Lastly Jesus tells us that we should not worry or be anxious because life is precious and we must joyfully live one day at a time. *"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble"* (Matthew 6:34). E. Stanley Jones once said, "Worry is the interest we pay on tomorrow's troubles." Being anxious over what is yet to be – or what might not be - is suffering in advance for something that may never happen. We cannot live our lives ruled by "what ifs." Jesus is telling us here that God does not overload any day with extra trouble. Each day has its appointed amount and so we must not anxiously reach into tomorrow and bring tomorrows' troubles into today: *"Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."* We must trust that God will deal with our troubles today and that He will be God over our troubles tomorrow. We can only live in the present. Yes, tomorrow is coming - but God is sovereign over yesterday, today and tomorrow. Proverbs 16:9 says: *"The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps."* Romans 8:28 tells us that *"for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose"* and Philippians 1:6 declares: *"he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ"*. Philippians 2:12-13 tells us we are to *"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."*

Hebrews 4:16 says: *“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* By God’s grace He gives us the mercy to stand against worry and anxiety in our days of trouble. Part of today’s mercy in the midst of today’s troubles is the ability to trust that there will be sufficient mercy for tomorrow’s troubles. Again, much too often we see God’s “mercy” in times of trouble the context of the everyday life in the world we live in - rather than in the context the “kingdom” life Jesus described to us throughout the Sermon on the Mount.

In 1931 a missionary named John Vinson was working in North China. An army of bandits swooped down on his village looting, burning, and killing. They took 150 Chinese and Vinson captive. When the government troops pursued the outlaws, the bandits offered Vinson his freedom if he would write a letter to the commanding officer of the government troops asking him to withdraw his troops. Vinson asked, "Will you then let the Chinese prisoners go free?" "Certainly not," was the reply. "Then I refuse to write the letter and be freed," he said. That night the outlaws tried to flee, taking Vinson with them. Many were killed, and many of the captives escaped. But Vinson could not run because of a recent surgery. A little Chinese girl later reported that a bandit pointed a gun at Vinson's head and said, "I'm going to kill you. Aren't you afraid?" Vinson looked up and said, "No, I am not afraid. If you kill me, I will go straight to God" - which he did just a few moments later. *“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”*

Pursuing the “righteousness” of God means we care about the things that God cares about. Our priorities, both in our own lives and in our community of faith, should line up with God’s priorities for our lives and for the world. This is what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ: seeking first the kingdom of God; committed to the lordship of Jesus; prayerfully seeking God’s heart; sacrificially obeying the commands of God’s Word; pursuing the will and priorities of God so that we might love them and live them out. And Jesus tells us that in all “these things” everything will be provided for. We need not worry. God will take care of us when we seek Him and His kingdom – in good times and bad, in health and in illness, in fair weather or storms, in peace and in war. This is the heart of our most sovereign and supreme God of mercy and grace that we see throughout all of Scripture.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
Psalm 23:1-6

Those who “seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness” are those whose hearts and lives are focused on the sovereign of God who lovingly and graciously provides for all our needs. *“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”* Those who suffer with worry and anxiety do so because their hearts and lives are focused *not* on what God *has given* but rather on what God *might not give*. Jesus is telling us this morning that when that happens, we miss out on what God has already graciously *provided*. Jesus is saying: “Don’t worry about what you want. God is already giving you what you need *right now*. Pay attention to what God is doing today. Don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen today or tomorrow. God will always give you what you need when, according to His will, you need it – whether it be food or clothes or health or money or possessions or time or position or comfort or security or fulfillment or success or strength or protection or healing or hope or rest or peace. The apostle Paul understood this when he wrote Philippians 4:6-7: *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

We see this in Isaiah the prophet’s prayer to God in Isaiah 26:3-4 when he declares: *“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock.”*

To seek “*first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*” is to seek to live in total, humble dependence on God and all that He graciously provides for us. We have no kingdom of righteousness of our own. The kingdom is God’s and our righteousness has been given to us through the crucified Christ, who died on the cross in our place for our sins, paying the penalty for our sins. The cross was graciously *given* to us by God so that we would not *get* what we deserve. Seeking “*first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*” is about living in daily dependence upon Jesus Christ. Jesus put it this way: “*Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it*” (Matthew 10:39). When we lose ourselves in Jesus, we are given all that we need – and much, much more. But when we focus on what we might or might not get - we lose it all, even our lives. This echoes Jesus’ command that we put our trust in what God gives us and stop worrying about what we might or might not get. The foundational struggle of anxiety and worry finds its source in our constant attempt to be in control of our lives. And the only way we can overcome our tendency to control everything, the only way we will ever stop worrying and start trusting, is to remember who God is and that He is in control of everything.

The cure for anxiety is knowing that God is all you need in life. We become anxious when things don’t go our way. We become anxious when our expectations are not met. We become anxious when fears from the past casts shadows on the present. We become anxious when the ache of old wounds rise up and cause pain today. We become anxious when our current circumstances conflict with our anticipated hopes. We become anxious when we focus on ourselves and our needs, instead of trusting in the goodness and grace and mercy and provision of our good and most gracious God. But when we truly, genuinely trust in who God is, anxiety dissolves and dissipates. We can choose to borrow trouble from tomorrow and live as if God is not there, or we can trust God and seek Him with all our hearts. When we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness - God will take care of all the rest.

A true story is told of a missionary who some years ago was getting ready to go away to a foreign country. As he was getting on the ship, a friend of his, who was a very wealthy, came to him and slipped a sealed envelope full of money into his hand. He told the missionary: “You take this envelope, and if at any time while you are overseas you come to the place where you have exhausted every other possibility, and you don’t where else to turn, and you have a need that you cannot meet anywhere else, open this envelope.” The missionary took the envelope, thanked him, put it in his pocket, got on the ship, and stayed in that mission field for twenty years. At the end of twenty years he came back home, and as he got off the ship, was met by that same wealthy friend, and he returned the envelope back to the man - still sealed, still unopened - and he said: “Never did I come to a place where I did not know where to turn, nor what to do. My God has always been with me and He has always provided.” Brothers and sisters – God calls us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and as we treasure Jesus and sacrificially love and live for Jesus, God will take care of all the rest. Amen.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:6-11

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