

Jesus and Anxiety

Matthew 6:25-34

**A sermon by Dr. Calvin Warpula
preached at the West University Church of Christ,
Houston, Texas, on August 14, 2011**

Jesus talked in very simple words about things like birds, sowing, reaping, barns, lilies, grass, and cooking to teach some profound lessons. We will see that in our message today.

The word “therefore” is a very important word in v. 25. This means that what Jesus will say now is based on what he just said in the previous verses 19-24. Here Jesus instructs us to lay up treasures in heaven, not on earth, and to have a single, focused, devoted life given to God. The anxiety that Jesus three times forbids in our lesson today is based on what he says in vs. 19-24. It is (1) having your treasure in the wrong place, (2) thinking about money in the wrong way, and (3) serving a master of the wrong kind. Jesus then in vs. 19-24 encourages us to think, then in verses 25-34 he commands us to act upon that thought.

Only when we have grasped the comparative durability of the two treasures (corruptible and incorruptible), the comparative usefulness of the two eye conditions (light and darkness) and the comparative worth of the two masters (God and mammon) are we ready to make our choice. [John R. W. Stott, Christian Counter Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1978, p. 160].

Only when we have decided for heavenly treasure, for light and for God are we ready to hear the words of Jesus, “Therefore...be not anxious.” Here Jesus commands us not to be overly concerned with our own security (what we eat, drink or wear) but with God’s rule and righteousness. Jesus is teaching us that the only possessions worthy of are striving are those that death cannot take away. Because God will take care of us, we do not need to worry, v. 25.

Imagine that you went to the doctor and were told that you were seriously ill. How would you feel if your doctor only said to you, “Don’t worry about it.” You would probably reply, “Only when you tell me that there is a cure for my illness would I quit worrying.” That’s what Jesus does here. Diagnosis is insufficient

without treatment. He tells us three times not to worry, but he shows us the antidote for worrying

Jesus tells us that the Father will provide for all our needs. Times were hard in the time of Jesus. The Romans had imposed a 40% taxation rate on their subjected people here in Palestine.

What Jesus Is Not Saying

1. Jesus is not telling us to quit work.

Jesus learned to work in Joseph's carpenter's shop and sweated several years as a carpenter. He is even called "the carpenter" in the gospels. The Jews said, "Whoever does not teach his son to work teaches him to steal." Jesus said that God feeds the birds—that's right, but he doesn't build their nests for them, nor does he put the seeds in their mouths. Jesus forbids worry but he does not condemn hard work, perseverance, diligence, responsibility, or care. Jesus means do not worry anxiously. He is not teaching us to be shiftless, reckless, thriftless, or thoughtless. God provides but we must cooperate.

2. Jesus is not forbidding us to prepare for the future.

He forbids anxiety, not pre-vision. There is a difference between fear thought and fore thought. There is a big difference between preparing for the future and in self-tormenting anxiety about it. Three times in these verses Jesus says, "do not worry," (vs. 25, 31, 34) but he is not telling us to be irresponsible, unconcerned, or uncaring about life's needs.

3. Jesus is not telling us to be unconcerned about others.

Later in this gospel of Matthew Jesus tells us that those who are welcomed into heaven are his disciples that have fed the hungry and clothed the naked. God uses us as his agents to accomplish his will in the world.

How does God meet our needs? In many ways, but one that is vivid in the opening chapters of the book of Acts is that the disciples in Jerusalem had their needs met when believers shared with one another. God did not miraculously create more food for them, but the richer shared with the poorer because of their common love. In the church, the people of the kingdom of God on earth, the way that God takes care of us is the bond of brotherhood and love that we share together in Christ.

4. Jesus is not telling us that we will not have trouble in this life. Jesus was troubled in spirit and suffered pain and agony as he faced the cross and on the

cross. The apostle Paul spoke of his intense concern for all the churches and that he often hungered, was beaten, imprisoned, sick, and even once left for dead after a mob stoned him. He wrote that in his ministry he was beaten with 195 lashes across his back. In v. 34, the last verse of this theme, Jesus says that each day will have its trouble. So Jesus is not promising a carefree, trouble-free life. No, far from it. Even the beautiful flowers Jesus talked about die and the sparrows fall to the ground. Jesus is saying that in the midst of life's troubles that God cares for us.

What Jesus Is Saying

Jesus gives us five reasons why he urges this lifestyle. Jesus says that worry is needless, senseless, useless, faithless, and godless. Then Jesus gives us two keys to defeat worry.

1. Worry is needless (6:25).

Life is much bigger than what we eat, drink or wear. If God created our lives and our bodies, he will take care of us. Life is far more than what we eat or drink or what we wear. God began a good work in us and he never leaves anything unfinished. Whatever God starts, he finishes.

It would be irrational for a girl to write to her boy friend, "Dear George, I hate you but I love you, Alice." Likewise it is irrational for us to say to God, "Dear God, I believe in you but I'm worried, Alice."

2. Worry is senseless (6:26).

God takes care of the birds and he will take care of you. Jesus was a bird watcher. I like to watch birds, too. At least, in this regard I am like Jesus. Birds do not store up food or drink. Birds do not grow crops. They do not plow and plant, sow and reap. God has provided a system, an environment, on this earth that provides for the birds. Animals work but they do not worry. The little sparrow Jesus speaks about works hard hunting food, building nests, and seeking shelter.

A farmer would be a fool who would take care of his chickens and neglect his children. It is criminal to let your animals starve whether they be fish, dogs, cats, horses, or hamsters. Will God treat us less than the way we treat our pets? Jesus never died for animals, but God invested the blood of his son in us, his people. And to argue from the lesser to the greater, if God cares so much for the animals, how much more will he care for us?

Animals, though, have to live within the system God has arranged for them. A sparrow cannot live under water and a lily cannot grow on concrete. When

the birds and flowers stay within the system God has designed for them, then they grow and flourish. Likewise, this teaching here is for disciples of the kingdom. When we stay within God's kingdom, and live by the principles taught by Jesus, then God meets our needs in his kingdom. If we live outside his will or contrary to his will, then we cannot expect to receive the blessings he promises. When we live according to God's plan, we lack nothing.

3. Worry is useless (6:27).

Jesus says that that we cannot add a single hour to our life. Worrying may cause premature death but it certainly cannot prolong our life. Worrying never got anybody anywhere except to an early grave.

4. Worry is faithless (6:28-30).

Flowers and grasses of the field are beautiful for a short while and then they are used as starter fuel to heat ovens to bake bread (6:28-30) and we are so much more valuable than the temporary wildflowers that are here today and gone tomorrow. How much more will he care for us who are his beloved children and for whom Jesus died? If God will get us to heaven, he will take care of the next 24 hours.

5. Worry is godless (6:31-32).

Worry is like the heathen: they have no heavenly father to care for them. If we worry, we are acting like the heathen who are without God in this world. If we trust God with our salvation, we can trust him with our lesser concerns. No one can legitimately call God "Father" and worry at the same time.

God will supply our needs. The Bible says, "The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless." (Psalm. 84:11). "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want." (Psa. 23:1).

Jesus says that the heathen "run after food, clothing, and drink." That's true, isn't it? Look at the glossy magazines with all their ads for clothing, restaurants, and wines and liquors. The world is concerned with the body and how to feed it, clothe it, warm it, cool it, refresh it, relax it, entertain it, exercise it, beautify it, and pleasure it. The world runs after these things. We even have ads for brands of dog and cat foods that will make our pets look their best. That's the total focus of the world.

Now don't misunderstand Jesus. He taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." Jesus is not against physical, material things or needs. He is simply saying that we must not become too engrossed with material things. Physical survival is not the ultimate goal of human existence.

But we as believers run after the Lord. The Bible says, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.” (Psa. 42:1). “I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (Psa. 73:23-26).

We may have many questions for God. But God has only one question for us. It is this: Are you trusting me? That is the question, the one question, that God asks of us. Are you trusting me? If so, you will not worry. Trust and worry are antagonistic.

How to Defeat Worry

Now, Jesus gives us two keys to defeat worry.

1. Defeat worry by concentrating on God’s kingdom (6:33).

Jesus wants us to let the desire for God and his righteousness to grow with in us to that this desire intensifies our efforts, it purifies our lives, and it dominates our thinking.

Jesus tells us not to live as though we were nothing but a body. No, there is a moral, ethical, spiritual man housed in our bodies that is far more important than what we wear, what we eat, or what we drink. The church father Origen wrote a statement that he calmed went back to Jesus. It said: “Ask for the big things and the little shall be added unto you. Ask for the heavenly and the earthly shall be added unto you.” We are to seek the heavenly first and foremost.

Anxiety will never be cured by getting more and more of the world. Anxiety can only be cured by the assurance that all our needs will be met by our King. So live under the rule of our King; obey his will; serve him with all you have. Two things will result. First, He will provide all that we need. He has never failed any of his children. Second, many of the things we thought we needed we now discover that we don’t need and do not want. We have replaced anxiety with contentment.

2. Live one day at a time (6:34).

Jesus says, “Do not worry over tomorrow’s evils for you know not what today will bring forth.” Perhaps tomorrow you will not be alive, and you will have worried for a world which will not be yours.” We are sandwiched

between yesterday and tomorrow. These are the two things that people worry about: the past and the future.

But this is so futile. Worry wastes today's time and clutters up tomorrow's opportunities with yesterday's problems. Can you even remember what you worried about last week? Worry about the future is actually like paying interest on money you never borrowed. No crisis ever happened in the future. Life is now and here. Worry about tomorrow only wastes what we could be doing today.

Dr. Thomas S. Kepler studied the things that people worry about: he said 40% of worries never happen, 30% of worries are of people's criticisms of us; 12% of worries are about old decisions, 10% of worries are about our health, and only 8% of worries are legitimate. But according to Jesus, not even that 8% is legitimate. As believers we need to seek to solve problems instead of worrying about them. However, one man did say that worrying did a lot of good. He said, "I know worrying works because all the things I worry about never happen."

When I was a child, my uncle Howard in rural Alabama had an old clock on his mantle. It was something like this old clock that I have here. [show clock] I liked to go to Howard and Hattie's house. One of my favorite memories was hearing that old clock go "tick-tock," "tick-tock" throughout the day and night. It was such a peaceful restful sound to sleep by.

Ralph Phelps in his sermon "How to Worry" tells about a clock that had a nervous breakdown. This new clock was ticking away on the shelf two ticks to the second as any good, self-respecting clock should tick when it began to think about how many times it was going to have to tick. Two ticks to the second means 120 ticks per minutes, it mused. That's 7,200 ticks per hour; 172,000 ticks per day; 1,209,600 per week for 52 weeks; and a total of 62,899,200 ticks per year. Horror! Straightway the clock had a nervous breakdown. The clock was taken to a psychiatrist who patched up the mainspring as well as he could and then asked, "Clock, what your troubles?" "Oh, doctor," wailed the clock. "I have to tick so much. I have to tick two ticks to the second and 120 ticks per minutes and 7, 200 ticks per hours and. . ." "Hold it, the psychiatrist cut in. "How many ticks do you have to tick at a time?" "Oh, I just have to tick one at a time," was the reply. "Then let me make a suggestion," replied the doctor. "You go home and try ticking one tick at a time. Don't even think about the next tick until you get this tick ticked. I believe you'll improve rapidly." That was twenty years ago and the clock is still ticking perfectly, one tick at a time. We need to learn the secret of breaking life down into chunks that we can handle.

Today, we have seen that worry is needless, senseless, useless, faithless, and godless. Jesus gave us two keys to defeat worry: seek first God and his righteousness and live in day-tight compartments. If after all that Jesus says today, you remain anxious, it is because either you do not understand him, or you do not trust him. In either case, the fault is ours. Jesus diagnoses the cause of worry, and he provides the cure. He is the cure. The question is, Are you being cured yet?

-cwarpula@westchurch.com