

SAYING "NO" TO WORRY

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Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34

I'd like to talk about an area that sometimes is a bugbear for many of us and tends to weigh us down. My Bible headlines it "The Cure for Anxiety."

Matthew 6:25-34

"For this reason I say to you, (and the reason we must understand comes from what He has been talking about before, that there are greater things that we need to focus on – things that are temporal, just momentary; we need to focus on things that will have eternal worth) do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is life not more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the sky, that they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather crops into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more important than they? And which of you by worrying can add a single day to his life's span? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

"So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Every time I read this passage, v. 34 almost seems to be tagged on by Jesus. He's reached His conclusion in v. 33 itself by saying, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added on to you." And then almost like an aside, He said, "Why are you worrying about tomorrow? Tomorrow has got enough problems of its own. Just leave that!" it's almost like He wanted to end with something light so that we can focus on the real thing. So, basically Jesus is saying, "Don't worry."

I think worry is something that plagues all of us. Telling someone not to worry is easier said than done. And yet, Jesus is saying very clearly, "I don't want you to worry." That's a clear statement from Him. Then He backs it up with reasons why you don't need to worry. But before we look at the reasons, we need to define worry.

What is worry?

Worry is to think about problems or unpleasant things that might happen, in a way that makes you feel unhappy and frightened. To think about problems or fears, to feel or show fear and concern because you think that something bad has happened or could happen. Because you are not in control of it, it leads to fear; fear of the outcome of that thing that you cannot control. Worry can also damage our health. Worry can damage our relationships. Worry can rob your joy, rob your opportunities. Worry can affect ourselves; worry can affect others and it can affect our relationship with God.

It seems like worry has only negative effects. There is nothing positive about worrying. You may say, "Wait a minute! There are things that I need to think about. I can't just leave it." Yes! There is a place for genuine concern about something. But concern for something and worrying about something are not the same. Concern acknowledges that something needs careful thought. Worry is given to consuming trepidation and apprehension. Concern leads to planning; worry leads to fear. Concern leads to healthy attention; worry leads to unhealthy anxiety. In fact, the Life Application Study Bible says, "Concern moves you to action while worry immobilizes you. Planning for tomorrow is time well spent; worrying about tomorrow is time wasted."

Further, when we look at scripture, we realize that worry is really a sin. How is it sin? Because the Bible says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, make your requests be known unto God." This place that you are anxious and worried, that's not a place that God wants you to be. God says, "You're worried because you can't handle it, and I want you to take that and give it to me. I will handle it." Worry is a sin because:

- It denies the wisdom of God. It says that God doesn't know what He is doing.
- It denies the love of God. It says that He doesn't care for each one of us.
- It denies the power of God. It says that God is not able to deliver us from whatever it is that is causing us to worry.

Why should we not worry? Jesus actually gives us three reasons in this passage.

1. He says that worry does not help. Very simple! In v. 27, "Can any of you add one moment to his lifespan by worrying?" Can you add to life by worrying? The truth is that worry can actually be detrimental to life. studies have shown that when you worry, when you spend time being anxious, it works adversely on your body.

2. He says, "Don't worry because God will take care of you." 1 Peter 5:7 says, "Casting all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you." How do we know that God cares? Jesus gives us 2 scenarios when He says:

- Just look at the birds of the air. Do they care? Do they plant or harvest? Do they save food or store food in barns? No! God feeds them. God shows them where food is available and they fly there and eat.

I remember during Covid time, we used to put food out on the window sill. First the crows would come, then the pigeons, then the mynahs and finally the sparrows. At the end, a squirrel also came. We live on the 12th floor, so God just pointed out to these creatures that He has made, where the food is. He takes care of them. God feeds them.

There's a lovely poem that I remember reading a while back – The Robin and the Sparrow.

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."

When we worry, we're really saying that God cannot take care of me. Jesus goes on to say, "Look at the lilies in the field, the grass. Look how beautiful they are. Solomon in all his splendor couldn't come close.

- They are temporal – here today and gone tomorrow. Yet God sees them; God takes care of them. How much more will He take care of you?

Jesus is giving us a very logical argument here. You don't need to be anxious because God cares for you. But Jesus makes this argument even stronger by saying that the birds are fine because God cares for them. Then He asks, "Aren't you more valuable than birds?" it's a rhetorical question, of course. The answer is: Yes, of course.

Jesus introduces five questions that actually lead a listener down a path where you will end with agreeing with Him.

1. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing?
2. Aren't you more valuable than birds?
3. Which of you, being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life?
4. Why are you anxious about clothing?
5. 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?

You can almost see Him saying: Okay. I'm going to stand in front of you and pose these questions to you. Then you think about it and answer, because these are rhetorical questions. In your mind, see whether you agree with me. He says, "Does God look after the birds?" You can see the crowd considering this. They see the birds flying around, looking perfectly happy. So the crowd thinks: Yeah, of course He takes care of them. Then Jesus says, "Does God clothe the lilies?" and you look around and see all the beautiful flowers and you think: Yeah! Certainly He does. Then Jesus asks this question: Are humans more valuable than birds or lilies? And the obvious answer is: Yes, of course. He follows up with: Does God know your needs? And the crowd is saying: Yeah! He does. Of course, God knows everything.

Finally, Jesus says: Well, why do you worry about clothes? Or whether you will be clothed? If God knows everything, why are you worrying? He'll take care of you. What you need is faith in God. That's why He says, "You of little faith." That's what you need. You need to have enough faith to know that God can take care of every situation that you are facing. That's always a point in our lives which calls for a decision.

As I look around this congregation, I know that so many of you were maybe worried even when you came here – worried about the future, worried about a circumstance or a situation that you are facing, worried about finances, etc. And it's not just "What do I do with this?" but it's plaguing you. You get up in the morning and it's the first thing that you think about and think about. And worry is not productive, so you'll stay with that feeling of being just absolutely helpless, and yet fearful of the consequences.

Yet, Jesus confronts each one of us today and He says, "Don't worry, I've got you. And for you to trust Me with this problem, you need to have faith. You need to be able to say: Lord, 'I have seen what You have done'. Even as we looked at that psalm, I know that You have brought me out of places of darkness and mourning. You've done extraordinary things for me. To be able to put all of that down and say, "Lord, because this is who You are, because Your Word says so, I'm going to give up this particular problem to You. I'm going to refuse to be anxious. I'm going to trust You.

He says three things:

1. It doesn't help to worry.
2. God will take care of you.
3. God anyway know your need. God knows everything that is going on in your life. He's omniscient, and so He'll take care of it.

Having reached that point where we're wondering about this, can I not trust God with this?

Jesus then moves further and He says, "But instead of worrying, you've got to do something." There's a conjunction there. This is not where you are supposed to be; here's where you are supposed to be. In this adversity that you are facing, in this trouble, in this problem, in this thing that's not going well for you – you cannot be here. Here's where you need to be. And where is that? Seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. That's a tough call – to say that I should not think about this, but I should concern myself with the kingdom of God? Why? Because, He says, if you do that, this gets taken care of. The consequence of seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness is that automatically, all these things will get taken care of.

There needs to be a mental shift for us as we think about what we are facing and say, "Can I leave this worry?" The answer is that you should, because that is what the Word is saying. Can I turn and say: Lord, I will seek You. Seek first and all these things will be provided for you. Jesus is not saying: Don't worry about all your problems; just lean back and let Me take care of everything. No! There's something proactive that you have to do as well. Leave the worry, leave the problem, leave that situation and focus on God, His kingdom and His righteousness.

A good litmus test to see whether we are indeed focusing on our problems is to ask the question: Where do I spend most of my energies? Is all my time and money spent on goods and activities that will certainly perish, or is it in the service of God?

Very often, we have two ways of handling anxiety and worry.

- 1) It takes us away from God. We decide that we're not going to have anything more to do with Him. I thought I could trust Him, and look where it's landed me. Then you move away. The logical place for us to respond is to come back to Him.
- 2) This is a little more subtle. We begin to expand all our energy into praying for the situation, and everything is focused on that situation. We get up in the morning and we pray. Then we read the Bible and see what God is saying to us about this situation. Through the day, we are crying out to God. All our energy is consumed in looking to God to solve this problem.

God is saying that it is not the solution. You cannot get myopic in dealing with your problem. There's a breadth and scope that needs your attention, and that is the kingdom of God. That needs to be your focus. So while we may think that prayer, the pursuit of getting that problem to God and honing in on speaking to Him about it, is a good focus, God is saying, "No, it's not! I'm not asking you to spend your time praying for this problem. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and then this problem gets taken care of."

What does that mean? I think it is three-dimensional.

- As we seek the kingdom of God, there is an **upward dimension** that we must spend time on. We need to have a healthy relationship with the King whose kingdom it is. We need to be able to say, "Lord, I want to have a better relationship with You. I'm not satisfied with the relation that I had yesterday." We know that in our normal relationships, if we don't put effort into them, they will slowly fall away. There must be an effort to get to know God better – to read His Word, to understand when He is speaking to us. We do the things that will help us to grow closer to Him. Spend time in worshipping Him, in praying, in church. Do not forsake the gathering together of the saints. These are things that God wants from us.
- **Inward dimension:** This involves ourselves as we seek His kingdom. It means that we allow the Spirit of God to mine, to change, to give us new focal points. We look at responses to

things, our thoughts, our behavior, the friendships that we have. How we give of ourselves to God – the gifts, the talents, the resources that we have. Are they all consistent with the values of God’s kingdom? Are we seeking righteous things, things that are right according to kingdom values?

- **Outward dimension:** Does our light shine? “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify My Father who is in heaven.” Do we live that kind of a life that people look at you and say: Who is your God? Why are you so different? Why do you respond in such a way that doesn’t seem like the normal way of response? Are you salt and light in the community that God has placed you? Do we love people? Do we have compassion for people around us? Are we generous with ourselves, our love, our gifts, our talents, our resources?

As we look at seeking the kingdom and His righteousness, we need to make sure that we are investing into the relationship with God, doing what it takes to draw closer. Take a look at yourself today and ask yourself this question: Am I closer? Do I have a better understanding of God today than I had a month ago? If the answer is ‘No’, then you are not really growing in that relationship. We need to take care of that upward dimension.

Ask yourself if your responses to situations, your behavior consistent with the behavior of a child of God? If I were to wear a sticker on my chest that said ‘I am a child of God’, would I be comfortable walking around in everything that I do?

Then the outward dimension. Are we able to showcase all that God is doing within us? Like the woman at Zarephath, we need to hear these words as said about Elijah, “I perceive that this is a holy man of God.” This must be what the community says about us. Just by looking at us, and the way we act, they say: MY goodness! I perceive that there is holiness in this person. This is a man/woman of God. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all those things that cause worry will get taken care of.

I love this quote by E. Stanley Jones: “Worry is atheism; worry is being an atheist. Because like an atheist, you don’t really believe that God can take care of you, that there’s no God.” And yet we know. We worshipped Him just a little while back and we know what He has done, what He can do in our lives. God is saying: Just let that be consistent in your life. I’ve shown you in the past what I can do; I can still do it today because I am the same yesterday, today, forever.

There used to be a chorus that I learnt when I was in Sunday School.

Why worry, when you can pray?
Trust Jesus, He will lead the way.
Don’t be a doubting Thomas,
Rest fully on His promise,
Why worry, worry, worry, when you can pray?

This morning, as I was in my office praying just before I came in here, God gave me this wonderful picture of this place, this congregation and everybody letting go of their worries, the issues that were causing them anxiety. It was like crumpled pieces of paper being thrown on the ground. I was looking at the mess that was there and it was like angels were coming and sweeping it into a fire and burning it off. What a wonderful picture! All we need to do is let go of those things that worry. Let’s just pray and as the Lord shows you or comes alongside of you and reassures you, would you just open your hands and let that worry fall and say, “Lord, I’m not going to think about it. I am

committed today to seeking Your kingdom and Your righteousness. Lord, I'm going after the upward dimension, the inward dimension and the outward dimension, and I'm going to stake my life on this promise of Yours that You'll take care of this situation."

Lord, I pray that Your peace and Your joy will flow back into these hearts. Come Lord, in those spaces where we have thrown worry and anxiety, fill them with Your joy and Your peace and the quiet confidence that You will take care of us. That Your eye that is on the sparrow will certainly take care of us and so bring freedom. Lord, whatever else is needed by Your children standing here, would You just fill their hearts, touch them in ways that they will know that the King of kings who says to seek His kingdom has got them, has got you, beloved. Thank You, Lord.