

Worry: Analyzed and Overcome

Matt. 6:25-34

Intro. We come this AM to a word of instruction that applies to everybody and is much needed today. It's Christ's teaching about anxiety and worry. Because life is so daily (have you figured that out?) and because there's so much cause for concern, it's a lesson that bears repeating. So for many of us, these verses may serve as a refresher course...a reminder. Pastor Jerry read the parallel passage in **Luke 12**. But let's consider Matthew's account here in **Matt. 6** beginning at **v. 25**.

Commenting on the negative effects of worry, Robert Frost, wrote this...*"The reason worry kills more people than work is because more people worry than work."* That's especially true given today's unemployment and underemployment numbers. Worry has become the great American pastime. Because worry can be so habitual and engrained, some trade old worries for new ones the moment the old ones expire. For those who are chronically anxious, worry is like the blanket Linus carries is never without. As strange and irrational as it may seem, worry is a form of security they rely on. They actually believe they're better off if they're worrying. But they're wrong. God says they're wrong and even medical science agrees!

And there's no end of things we could worry about....the high cost of energy / an economy that shows little sign of improvement / rogue nuclear nations / threats of terrorism / unemployment / tension in the Middle East / a dysfunctional government / illegal immigrants streaming into our country. Surveys show that more than half of Americans report irritability / anger / fatigue / and sleeplessness. Almost half say they self-medicate by over-eating / or indulging in unhealthy foods and drugs. Money and the economy tops the list of stressors for at least 80% of those surveyed.

Yet despite earthbound concerns which grow more numerous and intense every day, we can be sure of this...Jesus isn't worried. God isn't anxious. There's perfect composure and peace in the presence of God. And before our passage ends, that's where Jesus tells us to go. He urges us to run to our Heavenly Father who shares our concerns but has everything under control. He urges us to live with confidence in His promise to provide as we concentrate on things that matter most to Him.

So here in **Matt. 6** Jesus provides an analysis of worry and a strategy for overcoming this deadly sin. And yes, you heard me right. Worry is sin. Jerry Bridges includes anxiety in a list of what he calls "Respectable Sins..." Like jealousy, envy, anger, pride, judgmentalism, "respectable sins" are godless behaviors Christians often tolerate and make excuses for because so many are doing it. Yet in these verses, Jesus has a decisive instruction for all who choose to follow Him. 6 x's He used the word, **worry** and 3 x's He commands us not to do it! In fact, because God knows worry is contagious and pandemic in our world, the force of the original Greek is *stop worrying!*

In the context of the Sermon on the Mount, **vs.19-24** address the disciple's attitude toward luxuries ...the non essential items we can live without. Like insider information, the Savior sent from Heaven to earth...the brother who has seen both places...instructs us not to *treasure our earthly treasures*. We must not love them / be devoted to them / serve them / let them control us / or allow them to become gods in our lives. We must not think of perishable things as treasures to live and die for. We must hold material things loosely and send ahead as much treasure as we can.

Now in **vs. 25-34** – Jesus turns from non-essentials to the basic necessities of life. In **vs.19-24** He says, "Don't treasure your treasures." Now in **vs.25-34** He says, "*Don't be anxious about life's necessities either. Don't let any of these things distract you from what is most important in life.*"

Notice **v. 25** begins with the word, **Therefore**. And class, whenever we see the word **therefore** at the beginning of a verse, what question should we ask? We should ask what the **therefore** is there for.

In this instance, the adverb looks back to the previous section. It relates particularly to **v.24** and the fact that God is the Master we serve. There Jesus said, **“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.** Money is earned / but God gives freely. Money escapes our grasp very quickly / but divine resources are never depleted. Money is momentary / but God is unending. Money must be saved / but God is the Savior. So tell me, which is the better investment? Is it better to serve God or money? The fact that Christ’s followers choose to serve Him is the reason **Therefore** is there for. If you serve money, there’s plenty to be anxious about. But if God is the One you serve, there’s no cause for worry and nothing to fear. In **vs. 25-30** we find...

1. Worry Analyzed: three facts – vs. 25-30

The first fact is that **worry is unreasonable** (we might even say, irrational or stupid) – **vs. 25, 26** - **“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?”**

Don’t you appreciate the way the Lord bends down to reason with us? **Isa.1:18 – Come now, let us reason together says the Lord.** Jesus didn’t say, *“Stop worrying...period, end of discussion. I’m God so do what I say!”* Having given us the ability to think and reason, Jesus knew we’d appreciate an explanation. When we wonder, *“Why shouldn’t I worry?”* He could have said, *“Because I said so!”* Instead, He provides rational arguments to prove how unreasonable worry is.

As we unpack His explanation, notice a phrase that appears 3’xs in these verses. In **v.25** we see the comparative phrase, **more important**. Then in **v.26** we see the phrases, **more important** and **much more valuable**. Here Jesus argues from the lesser to the greater using what is called an *a fortiori argument*. It’s an argument that presents two possibilities where one is more probable than the other. It works this way...whatever can be affirmed about the lesser possibility can be affirmed with even greater force concerning the possibility that is more probable. For example, if Germany whips Argentina this afternoon, you can be sure they can whip the Flushing H.S. varsity soccer team. No offense to the Flushing H.S. soccer team, but are you with me?

Using this type of argument, Jesus said in **v. 25**, your life is more important than food and your body is more important than clothing. Your being, that is **your life**, is more important than a t-bone steak or a suit by Giorgio Armani. Can we agree on that? But how does that make worrying unreasonable? I’m glad you asked, but let me answer with a question. Who gave you life in the first place? Who keeps your heart beating and your diaphragm working so air is drawn into your lungs? In other words, who regulates your vital functions? The world has deliberately chosen to forget this...but the answer is, God! Since God is the giver, creator and sustainer of life...(the Bible says so) and since God has called us to be His very own sons and daughters...do you seriously think He’ll keep your vitals regulated but fail to provide you with food and clothing? *“If you really want something to worry about...worry about whether your heart will keep beating. Don’t worry about what you’ll eat for breakfast...worry about whether you’ll wake up tomorrow morning.”* You see, if we trust God for the really big things...the beating of our hearts...the maintenance of our vital functions...the continuation of our lives...shouldn’t we trust Him for the smaller things?...the oatmeal / the orange juice / the eggs and the bacon?...(By the way, it just isn’t breakfast without bacon!) Amen?

It’s like this...when you purchase a diamond ring the jeweler typically throws in a box at no extra charge. You are God’s diamond...His treasure. We’re all diamonds in the rough, but the Bible says we are God’s most valuable possession.

Believing sinners are the treasure hidden in the field for which the man (Jesus) sold all He had to purchase for Himself. In the parable, the church is the pearl of great price. Since God values us the way a jeweler values a diamond, don't you think He'll throw in the box?...Don't you think He'll provide the lesser things necessary to sustain and protect the life He values so highly?

Then in **v.26**, God's care is supported by a second a fortiori argument which consists of an illustration from nature. **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?** I don't know much about ornithology but I know most birds don't store food the way squirrels do. Like ants, birds are busy creatures. They're constantly gathering food for themselves and their young. Did you ever see a lazy bird on welfare that refuses to work? Me either. So here Jesus presents truth in balance. God supplies His creature's needs but He ordained work for birds to do and work for people to do. In the beginning, Adam and Eve were instructed to till the ground to provide for themselves. Yet God caused seed to germinate and God sent a mist to water the ground. In the beginning God and man worked together as partners. That's truth in balance. Food doesn't automatically show up in a bird's nest nor does it magically appear on a table. We work, but God gives the increase.

But the point of **v.26** is this...if our heavenly Father provides for feathered creatures with so little value...don't you think He'll take care of you?...you big lump of love? You are far more valuable to God than a bird is! Jesus repeats this in **Matt. 10:31 - So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.** I'm sorry to break the news....but when birds, fish and animals die, they're gone. But God breathed into mankind a soul that will live forever! In fact, human beings are so valuable and so loved by God, He gave His Son to take our sin and die the death we deserved. Having gone to such lengths to save the likes of us, don't you think He'll provide the food necessary to sustain us?

But what about world hunger? Do you mean to say, no follower of Christ will ever go to bed hungry? An answer may not be apparent in every situation, but we know that God in history past has allowed famine and a shortage of basic necessities for at least two reasons. First, God sends famine as a judgment for sin and unbelief. People tend to look up when their food supply is cut off. It happened in the days of Joseph and later in the days of Elijah. But sometimes the Lord allows His people to experience a shortage of basic necessities to test and refine our faith. He allows us to go without so we'll learn to lean on Him all the more. Yet listen to what King David wrote in **Ps. 37:25 - I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.** Read the stories of George Mueller. When the pantry shelves were empty and the last crumb of bread was gone, God answered Mueller's prayer by causing a bread truck to break down in front of the orphanage. Unable to deliver the bread before it spoiled, the whole truck load was given to the orphans! Like He did for the Hebrews in the wilderness or like Jesus did for the multitudes gathered to listen to Him, the Lord can produce or send food in a miraculous way.

But more often, God's is pleased to bless the work of our hands. Yet God may also provide through the generosity of His people who share their wealth with others in need. That was the situation in **Acts 2:45** which says, **Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.** So the first fact is this...worry is unreasonable. It defies logic. If God loves you and values your life as highly as He does, don't you think He'll provide what you need to stay alive?

The second fact is this...**Worry is unproductive – v. 27 - Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?** Let me answer that...NONE of us can! I think it was Chuck Swindoll who said *“Worrying is like rocking in a rocking chair. It's something to do but it won't take you anywhere.”* Who ever added a single hour to his/her life by worrying about their longevity? Yet some who spend their whole life worrying about cancer because it's “in their family history”, die of a heart attack or get run over by a truck. (isn't that a cheerful thought?)

In **Psa.139:16** the psalmist wrote, **All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.** In other words, in His sovereignty, God knows and planned the number of days we have on earth. He knew the day of our birth and He knows the day of our departure. This being the case, worry is irrational and unproductive. Yet here's something to chew on...within the sphere of God's sovereignty and foreknowledge, our health may deteriorate and our life may be shortened because we worry so much.

Worry can't grow our savings account / it can't bring back a prodigal son or daughter / it can't ward off cancer or senility. And medical science tells us worry and stress cause insomnia / ulcers / high blood pressure / head aches and heart disease. Worry can sour our mood / distance our friends / and hinder our fellowship with God. So let me amend that second point because worry is productive in certain ways. The trouble is...it can't produce things we want or hope it will produce. Worry is a killer.

Then finally, **worry is unbelieving – vs. 28-30 - "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?"**

At **v.28**, the necessary item shifts from food to clothing. Today worry has intensified from merely having clothing to having "the right" clothing. Am I right about that? Have you shopped for clothing for the kids with the kids? Today, color, size, style and functionality aren't as significant as the name on the label. At age 64 do you know what I've figured out? I figured out I'm the same guy in cutoffs and a tee shirt as I am in suit and tie. I'm the same guy whether I'm driving a well-worn Chevy S-10 or a shiny new Ferrari. But I have to admit...an old guy driving a Ferrari looks kind of tragic! So when it comes to worrying about outerwear Jesus asks the question, "Why do you do that?"

Using the same kind of argument, Jesus turns our attention to wild flowers. The verb "see" means more than a casual glance. Here Jesus encourages us to observe flowers carefully...to examine and study their beauty. Scholars say the Greek word *krinon* which is translated **lily of the field** may have been an anemone, a scarlet poppy, a gladiolus, or an inconspicuous type of daisy. From the description given we know *krinon* was a wild flower that appeared each spring with the new grasses. These flowers would appear on Judean hillside one day, and be gone the next. Yet during their brief life span, they were more beautiful than a king's finest robes. Praise God!

Don't you enjoy the flowers that come up along our Michigan highways?...the evening primrose / the purple coneflower / the stiff goldenrod / the black-eyed susan / the cylindrical blazing star. (Don't for a moment let me deceive you into thinking I know which one is which.) The amazing thing is that each flower along with about 300 other species grows naturally. They're God-made. In the world before the Noah's flood) flowers covered the earth and were food for the animals. Fossilized remains of mammals have been found with flower seeds in their digestive tracts.

So Jesus makes the point that flowers and grasses, which are far less impressive than flowers, are transient. Yet none of these flowers and grasses that beautify the earth work or worry. I mean, have you ever seen a worried wild flower? Did wild grass ever have a panic attack? So Jesus said, **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?**

An interesting thing about the **grass of the field** is one of ways people of the Middle East used it. Dr. William Barclay says the Middle Eastern oven was often a box made of clay. The clay box was set on bricks over a wood fire.

But when the lady of the house wanted to raise the temperature of her oven quickly, she would toss some handfuls of dried grasses and wild flowers into the oven and light them. This was her version of a micro-wave oven. But that's all these grasses were good for. So here's the point...if God gives such beauty to a flower that has such a short life, and God provides grasses that have such little value... isn't it reasonable to believe He will the things needed by the human beings He created to live forever? As I look out, every person here this morning, proves this is true. There's not a naked person among us! (Let us give thanks for that!) If God invests such lavish care to dress and beautify the ground, do you seriously think He'll forget the needs of His highest creation? You may not be decked out in Giorgio Armani, but God promises to provide for His own even if you shop at the Good Will store. (By the way, that's a great place to shop!) I'm not too proud to wear a dead man's shoes...especially when they're Florsheim or Red Wings!

But the last 5 words of **v.30** expose the problem. Worry enters where trust departs. Some of us can't chew gum and walk at the same time. But here are two things no one can do simultaneously. We can't trust God and worry at the same time. Yet how many Christians who trust Christ to save them and take them to heaven, are all tied in knots about the stuff they need until they get there. How many trust God for eternity but doubt He can provide for them in the next 24 hours? Jesus says such worry is unreasonable / unproductive / and unbelieving. It's sinful because it misrepresents Him.

v.30 explains why worry is sinful. Worry exposes a heart of unbelief. It doesn't indicate a complete absence of faith but a deficiency of faith. Jesus instructs us to, "Trust God to meet our needs." God's trustworthiness is on the line. So let me ask, "Did God take care of you yesterday? What about the day before? What about the day before that? Then why won't you trust Him for today and tomorrow? What kind of Father do we have? Is His love ever maxed out? Is His faithfulness ever exhausted? Since worry is sinful and everything Jesus said about it is true, we need to overcome it. We must not give in to anxiety and worry. By our attitudes and actions we must glorify the God who never fails to keep His promises. And Jesus tells us how to do that in the closing verses of **chap. 6**.

2. Worry Overcome: three solutions – vs. 31-34 - 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 first solution for worry is in **vs. 31, 32**. I've paraphrased it this way...**Run to your Father**. Can you remember doing that as a young person? You needed \$20 for a field trip or \$75 for new cleats. What did you do? You ran to dear old dad. Just like you do or did back then, **Phil. 4:6** says, **Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.**

For the second time, Jesus said in **do not worry**. Don't worry about food, drink or clothing. (**vs. 31**) Then in **v.32** we're given the first solution to this great pastime. **For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.** Jesus said the unsaved people of the world **run after all these things** (food, drink and clothing.) The unsaved don't know our Heavenly Father...the father who loves them and wants to meet their needs. But as Christ's followers, we do. We know Him. We've experienced His love and tender care. He already met our deepest need.

We're called to be different from the unsaved world because of who our Father is. **I Pet. 1:15, 16** says, **But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."** So instead of running after all these things...we run to our Heavenly Father whose name is Jehovah Jireh, the Lord our provider.

He knows what we need and He delights to meet those needs even before we ask. We run to Him by way of prayer. As Jesus taught earlier in **chap. 6** we ask Him to **give us this day our daily bread**. At mealtime and throughout the day, we thank Him for all He provides. Peter learned how much God could be trusted. He wrote in **I Pet. 5:7 - Cast all your anxiety on him because He cares for you**. So while many around us are worried and chasing the things of the world, Christ's followers draw near to their Father who lovingly cares for His own.

The second solution for worry is found in **v.33** where Jesus said, **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well**. We overcome worry as we switch our focus from concerns God has promised to take care of, to matters God commands us to be concerned about....namely, His Kingdom and Righteousness. Notice, we must seek His kingdom and righteousness **first**...which means, ahead of everything else. We don't have time this AM to consider all that is meant in this phrase, but **His kingdom and His righteousness** is probably the best title we could come up with for the entire Sermon on the Mount. Remember the Beatitudes and the Similitudes of **chap.5**? Remember what Jesus taught in **chap.6** about telling the truth / about love and lust / anger and faithfulness in marriage? Remember how Jesus instructs us that our giving, praying and fasting must be done in secret? Remember how he emphasized rewards and the urgency of not loving earthly treasures? These are the important qualities we must pursue. These qualities describe the lifestyle and righteousness of those who belong to His kingdom.

And notice His promise for those who make these things their priority and highest concern...**all these things will be given to you as well**. God has been faithful to this promise time and time again in my life! Jesus calls us to relax with regard to the physical and material dimension of our lives while giving our first attention to the spiritual and eternal dimension of who we are. In **Col. 3:2**, Paul put it this way...**Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things**.

Then in closing, Jesus has one further solution for worry. He instructs us to **choose to live one day at a time – v. 34 - Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself**. There's that adverb **Therefore** again. It means...because everything I just said is true...**do not worry about tomorrow**. Research proves that more than 90% of things people worry about never come to pass. Mark Twain understood this. He said, *"I'm an old man and I've known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened."* The problem with worrying about tomorrow is that we never run out of tomorrows. There's always another tomorrow. So God asks us to trust Him one day at a time. Remember how Jesus said we should pray...**Give us today our daily bread**. He doesn't give us tomorrow's help today. So don't worry about tomorrow. Concentrate on what He has for you today. And when tomorrow comes, God's will be there to meet your need.

The verse ends...**Each day has enough trouble of its own**. The fact that each day has enough trouble of its own is well established. Don't you agree? But here's what happens, when you add tomorrow's worry to today's troubles, you exceed the weight limit any person can carry. Did you ever try to carry too many grocery bags at once? Did you ever try to carry all the bags making one trip when three trips was more reasonable? Here's what happens... some-thing falls and you just hope it isn't a gallon of milk or carton of eggs. The lesson here is this...don't try to carry too much baggage at once. The challenges of today are sometimes more than enough. Trust God today and let Him handle tomorrow too! Corrie Ten Boom said, *"Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, it empties today of its strength"*...and may I add...joy. So to each of His followers Jesus says, *"Don't worry, I've got this. I only ask you to trust Me."*