

Matthew 6:25-34

CENTRAL THEME: *'Do not worry!'*

The message of these verses is clear and simple – do not let your life be characterised by worry about the things God has promised to provide and for which he encourages us to pray. The main argument goes from the greater to the lesser: if God provides so richly for less important things like birds and flowers, how much more confident should we be that he will provide for us?

Context:

'Therefore...' Jesus has been teaching his followers to stop serving money and making wealth the goal of their lives. Some may well ask, *'ok, but what about the necessities of life? If I turn my back on the pursuit of money, what happens to my dependents?'* Jesus answers that question now, but it is important to remember too his teaching on prayer in which he both encouraged us to pray for daily bread and encouraged us that our heavenly Father knows our needs (6:8, 11).

• Does he really mean don't worry about anything, ever...?

As ever, Jesus speaks in stark, unnuanced terms to make his point forcefully. His target is the faithlessness and worldly focus that lives as if there is no loving God in heaven looking after his children.

The Bible calls us both to care deeply, and not to give in to anxiety. As Carson puts it: *'There is a sense in which worry is not only good, but its absence is, biblically speaking, irresponsible. There is a sense in which worry is not only evil, but its presence signifies unbelief and disobedience.'* We should be concerned about the struggles of people we love and care for (2Corinthians 11:28-29; Philippians 2:27-28, 3:17-18). Likewise, the wrestle with sin in Romans 7 doesn't exactly sound carefree! But we should not be anxious and over-burdened about the material circumstances of our lives (Luke 10:38-42). Things get tricky when our worries are a mixture of healthy and unhealthy.

1. Don't worry, you matter to God (25-27)

The general principle is stated clearly and simply in verse 25: do not worry about the necessities of life. The first argument that Jesus employs in verse 25 is that life is more than just food and clothes. Worry tends to consume us, so that we think about nothing else. If we are obsessed with worries and concern about these things, we will fail to live rich full lives that are focussed on truly great concerns like God's kingdom and righteousness (33).

The argument that follows in verse 26 is an implicit lesser to greater: *'if this, then how much more that?'* If God cares for the birds of the air in this way, how much more confident should you be that he will take care of the needs of his own children? We are not just creatures he has made and is responsible for; we are made in his own image.

Verse 27 then supplies a very practical further reason not to be paralysed with worry: it doesn't work! Worry doesn't help solve problems. I think his specific point here is that it is God who is responsible for the length of our days (Psalm 139:16). When we

stop trusting God and indulge in worry for things he provides, it is as if we are saying we can provide better than him. But we can't even add a single hour to the length of our lives!

2. Don't worry, have faith in God (28-30)

Jesus returns to the second issue he raised in verse 25 – clothes. Again the point is that if God takes such care over the appearance of flowers that will have faded in just a few days, then we should not worry that he will fail to provide for the clothing of his children during our many years on earth. Having established that, he calls on us to have faith. That is, to live out what we say we believe in our response to worry.

3. Don't worry like a pagan who doesn't know God (31-32)

Jesus summarises his point in verses 31-32. In 5:47 and 6:7 Jesus called on his followers to be distinctive from the pagans around them in their attitude to enemies and prayer. Now he calls on them to be distinctive in their attitude to the worries of life. In essence it's a challenge: our response to worry should be markedly different from those who do not believe that they have a loving father in heaven. This is very helpful in that it gives a more concrete way to judge right response to worry: the question is no longer *'am I trusting God enough?'* The answer to that will always be *'no!'* The question is instead *'is there a difference between my response to worry and that of friends who have do not believe their lives are in the hands of a loving heavenly Father...?'*

3. Seek first his kingdom (33-34)

The alternative to worry is not to stop caring about anything, but to trust that God knows our needs (cf 6:7) and so turn away from the selfish concerns which so often consume us, and instead focus on God's kingdom. How much more useful would we be to God and the needy of this world if we were less obsessed with material needs and comforts?! It is also the case that worry is not cured by receiving the stuff we want. Those with most stuff are often most worried. The cure is not to pursue more stuff, but to pursue God instead. As Sinclair Ferguson comments, *'how foolish to seek the gift when it is possible to seek the giver.'* It is important to recognise that *'all these things'* is not *'everything I want'*, but *'my daily needs like food and clothing.'* We must not take it to mean that anything we forego to serve God will be given to us in this life. That is not promised.

Likewise, this is *not* a promise that no Christian will ever starve to death. We know that has happened. It is a promise that God is in charge and he will provide what we need. Our worries do not make any difference. In the normal run of events we know God will provide all the food and clothing and shelter we need. And should God determine that we are to starve, he will enable us to trust him through it as he brings us safely home to feast in paradise.

Jesus finishes on a practical note. Not only is worry theologically wrong, it is also pointless: worrying about tomorrow achieves nothing. Focus instead on the day in front of you. There's more than enough in most days to keep us busy!

APPLICATION

Mounce writes that *'worry is practical atheism and an affront to God.'* When we worry about things God has told us to pray for – such as our daily needs of food and clothing – we proclaim with our lives that there is no loving God in heaven looking after us. The point is not to stop caring about anything, but not to be ruled by anxiety; to stop responding to cares and concerns as if it is all down to us; as if we do not have a loving heavenly Father who knows our needs and cares for our lives.

How much we worry is likely to be determined by our character, upbringing and the responsibilities and circumstances of our lives. How we respond to those worries is what marks out the man or woman of faith. We don't want those with sensitive consciences and heavy burdens to go away feeling like failures for the concerns they carry. A parent with a child turning away from Christ *should* be worried. Someone out of work and unable to pay the mortgage is bound to be anxious about it. However, the truth of God's fatherly care and provision must make a difference to how we handle even that concern.

Ultimately, the focus of this section is not so much on the command as the promise – the promise that God cares for us and will provide for us.

- The answer is not *'let go and let God.'* Trust in God is not an alternative to hard work. God's usual means of provision is through our hard work and the generous help of our church family when we are in trouble. That is why the church's response to the famine in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-29) is not to tell them *'don't worry, God will provide,'* but rather to raise famine relief from among the gentile churches (cf Rom 15:25-26). We plan and we work remembering that ultimately it is God who provides. This should lead us to pray, as Jesus has already commanded us in Matthew 6. Paul shows how prayer helps free us from anxiety and worry in Philippians 4:6-7: *'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'*

Other helpful texts for worriers:

*The Psalms are full of praise to God for his provision. It is good to meditate on them when you are battling anxiety. Read Psalm 34:8-10; 65; 104:1-23; 147:8-9.

*Romans 8:32 *'He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?'*

QUESTIONS

- How do you respond to these verses?
- When might worry and anxiety be sinful?
- When might it be right to worry about things?
- What do you do when you are worried?

Verses 25-27

- What is Jesus simple command to us here?
- What things in particular does he focus on?
- What is his reasoning in verse 26? What about in verse 27?

Verses 28-30

- What is the reason for not worrying about clothes?
- What does it show if we do obsess over this?

Verses 31-34

- What is the contrast in verses 31-32? Why is it pagan to worry about food and clothes?
- Why is this a helpful contrast for Jesus to draw? [*shows us how to see if we are worrying overly – are we different from pagans*]
- What instead should be the focus of our lives? What does that mean?
- What can we expect from the promise in verse 33?
 - What will it look like for us to be focussed on God's kingdom rather than our needs?
 - What difference can you see between how you / other Christians handle worries compared with unbelievers you know?
 - What about Christians who have died in a famine? Does that not undermine verse 33?
- How practically should we handle anxiety and worries? [*prayer and practical planning*]
 - What say to someone who is naturally anxious and a worrier and feels condemned?
 - What say to someone who is far too laid back and never takes responsibility for anything?