

## “Jesus’ Remedy for Anxiety”

*Matthew 6:25-34*

It’s not uncommon when I’m preparing a sermon that I find myself dealing with the issue I’m preaching on. In the last couple of weeks, I’ve been dealing with an older male who’s been having anxiety issues. He’s losing his hearing and if there any major changes in his home he gets uneasy and so he’s not sleeping well or eating regularly. So, I thought since I’m working on Jesus’ words ‘Do not worry’ I thought I would share some of these with him. Unfortunately, when I did, Winston my dog just stared at me without expression although his tail was wagging so I guess that was still a good sign! Well let’s see if Jesus’ words work better on us humans.

Worry! Who doesn’t worry about the issues of life? We worry about our children, our finances, our future. These are all things we naturally worry about but if we’re not careful we can become obsessive about some of these things to the point where worry paralyzes us from making good decisions because we’re worried we might make the wrong one! And then we worry that we upset God because we didn’t know if we did the right thing. So next time we don’t decide – which, by the way is a decision.

Here, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has been speaking to very day-to-day issues. Our spiritual life in 6:1-18 (giving, fasting and praying) and finances in vv.19-24. Because the majority of His listeners were probably poor and needed to trust and ask God for their daily needs, money was a worry. And, they had been falsely taught by the Pharisees that if you’re poor you’re not blessed of God. From what we read in John 7:49 that’s what the Pharisees believed the ‘crowds’ who followed Jesus were; cursed because they didn’t follow the Law. And the evidence you didn’t follow God’s words were that you were poor.

Jesus comes along and blesses the poor, the spiritually hungry, those who genuinely grieved about sin and were willing to be persecuted for identifying with Jesus. In Matt. 4:23-26 when He began His ministry it was the sick, the diseased, the infirm and the demon-possessed who streamed to Jesus because He could and did something practical for them. He cared for them, healed them but also gave them hope.

But at this point, if you’re one of the poor listening to Jesus’ words and Jesus says ‘Don’t pursue money, be generous’, you’re thinking ‘I don’t have anything to give, I can barely meet my family’s needs! How can meet their needs if I don’t money? In these verses Jesus shows all of us that worrying is a failure to trust God, therefore, trusting God is the remedy to worry.

When Jesus begins v. 25 with “therefore” after what He just said about not serving money but God, He obviously means to show us why we can trust God for the things we do need money for. Because even though we’re not to live for it, we still need it. And Jesus knows that’s where the minds of His listeners were going by saying,

*"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 than food, and the body more than clothes?"*

The basics of life; food, clothing and health. *"Therefore, I tell you"* is Jesus’ words of authority. Jesus is speaking into our life about unnecessary worry. What does He tell us?

## **Jesus Says Unnecessary Worry is to Lack Faith** **(6:25-30)**

That Jesus is speaking authoritatively here implies we can trust what He has to say. When He says serve God and not money He is saying that we can trust God who knows we will need money for basic things as well as if we're to be generous we have to something to share! Can we trust God for that too? Jesus speaks with authority that we can.

But we have to understand worry is a faith issue. At the end of this 'do not worry' section He ends it with '*O you of little faith*'. Five times Jesus describes His disciples as having little faith, but even little faith – like a mustard seed – can believe God can do big things. So worry means to lack faith; to fail to be confident in the character and ability of God to meet your needs, to give you peace, hope and direction.

What then can we do to lessen worry and increase trust? Jesus says this in a way that says,

### ***Stop it (worry) when it starts (v.25, 28)***

In both v.25 and 28 'Do not worry' means put a stop to this. He recognizes that we will worry; but when you worry put a stop to it. Identify it as a failure to trust God and so stop living faithlessly. But you can't stop doing one thing without replacing it with something else, otherwise you won't discipline yourself to change and grow in Christ. Put a stop to worry when it occurs and . . .

### ***Ask yourself biblical questions (v.25b, 26, 27, 30)***

Did you notice that Jesus deals with a solution by asking questions that have obvious answers? Questions that draw us to logical and theological conclusions. The first question is:

*Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?*

Do we only live to exist? Does our life center around food and clothing? No, Jesus implies. But when we worry, that becomes the center of our world. So, when we're worried let's ask ourselves,

#### **1. Why am I centering my life around this?**

Whatever 'this' is, when we worry about something it can consume us. It could be a legitimate need. It could be about an uncertain tomorrow or next week. It could be about a family member. It could be about someone's opinion of us. Why are we making what we worry about the central focus of our life? Jesus says stop doing that. Our worry -as real as it is- is not the center of our life. Life is about God and accomplishing God's purposes. And our worries will not thwart the plan of God. It can hinder God's plan through us because our anxiety stunts our spiritual growth and hinders our relationship with God and each other. What concerns you right now? Has it become the focal point of your life? That's when worry becomes sin. Jesus knows we'll worry but He wants us to stop it before it becomes the center of our world. Life is more about our temporal problem.

He then gives His first illustration; birds. They fly around seemingly unworried about their needs. Unlike man, the animal kingdom doesn't have to plant its own food, then reap its plantings and then build barns to store it in. So we're supposed to 'let go and let God'. We're supposed to stop working and trust God to miraculously supply our needs? No. He says we are more valuable to God than birds. Birds aren't responsible to God for how they look after the earth nor are they expected to save souls nor are they built with a soul that requires them to glorify God with their life. The point isn't

that we are to be carefree like birds. The point is that we serve a greater purpose than birds and are far more valuable to God – who meets their needs everyday – and therefore will meet our needs everyday. Here's the question we ask from this:

## 2. Does God care about me?

Answer yes, far more than animals. He's omniscient; He's omnipotent and omnipresent. When we're worried about a problem or a need we need to ask ourselves 'Does God know and care?' Yes, he does. Relax. Trust Him. He's under control. Think about the millions of birds in the world (and other animals) who are provided for. If God looks after the less valuable parts of His creation, how much more you and I?

<sup>1</sup> *LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens.*

<sup>2</sup> *Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. <sup>3</sup> When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, <sup>4</sup> what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?*

When we look at the awe-inspiring beauty of creation, why are we centered out to be cared for like no other? God will come through.

And Jesus follows that with another question: <sup>27</sup> *Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?*

## 3. How is worry beneficial? (v.27)

Can't make you live longer. Actually, studies show that stress and anxiety shorten life. Question: how many of you want to shorten your life? NOBODY. Then stop needless worry about things we can't control. Here's the 'benefits' of excessive stress;

- Increased blood pressure, heart palpitations, upset stomach, extreme fatigue, breathing problems, headaches, irritability, panic attacks, a sense of doom and depression

What a 'great' benefit package? The apostle Paul tells us to ask a similar question in Phil. 4:8-9 when we're anxious.

Jesus gives a second illustration; lilies. Flowers are attractive. If you examine them through a microscope they are fantastically created. Jesus says, Solomon in all his kingly pomp and circumstance doesn't compare to God's creations. Why Solomon? Because he was the wealthiest man who ever lived. If anyone had it all, Solomon had it all. How'd that work for him? Read Ecclesiastes. Everything under the sun is transient, fleeting, like soap bubbles. Nothing under the sun can satisfy us because we were made for something more; for God and only He truly satisfies us. So Jesus asks

<sup>30</sup> *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—you of little faith?*

Jesus uses a common Jewish practise to argue from the lesser to the greater. If God covers and designs and looks after flowers, will He not much more look after us? Jesus points us to the future promises of God? Here's another great question to ask ourselves when we're anxious and waiting for a need to be met;

#### 4. What promises has God made about my future? (v.30)

Well let's see; I get to spend eternity with God, my sins will be wiped away, I get to live on a beautiful sinless earth where I'll have my needs met forever! Now He argues from the greater to the lesser. If God has promised us all this forever, surely, He can take care of this small need or problem now.

What are all these questions about? Trusting God. Having faith in what God has declared to be true. Worry is faithless; it takes us away from God and the truth and makes ourselves the center of the universe.

Put a stop to worry when it begins. Ask biblical questions reminding ourselves that God is for us not against us. And

#### ***Look for the faithfulness of God (v.26, 28)***

Jesus said "look at the birds" and "see how the lilies grow". Every day examples that show us God is in control of His creation. If God is in control of His creation and we're part of it, He'll work in us too. The creation is a marvellous teaching tool. The consistency of its patterns every day. Morning, evening. Summer, fall, winter, spring. The cycle of the new and full moons each month. The predictable and mathematically consistent orbits of planets so that we could shoot a rocket to moon and back – all these remind us as well that the grace and mercies of God arrive fresh daily like the sun rises and sets. When we're anxious remind ourselves that God and Jesus are always faithfully working around us. Look and see it for yourself.

Jesus isn't finished with the looking metaphor. He raps this up in vv.31-34 by showing us what the remedy is for worry:

### **Jesus Says the Opposite of Worry is Trusting God** **(6:31-34)**

A greater trust in God will reduce worry. He uses the word "seek" to show us two types of seeking; one which results in worry and the other in freedom.

*<sup>31</sup> So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.*

#### ***Don't seek what the unsaved seek (vv.31-32)***

The unsaved 'run' or 'eagerly seek' the things that we worry about. Don't get caught up in that; that just leads to stress and anxiety. Because, as we learned from the Solomon example, the things of earth aren't made to satisfy us. And it's not just the things of this world, it's sometimes the unrealistic expectations we Christians put on ourselves that God doesn't. The perfectly behaved children, the perfect home, the perfect retirement package, the perfect job. None of that exists this side of heaven.

Jesus says, how can the unsaved of the world see how Jesus has changed us when we worry about the same things and in the same way as they do? There is a greater seeking we are to do and that is v.33,

*33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Jesus says instead of eagerly seeking after the things the world seeks after (and the anxiety that goes with it),

### **Seek the Rule of God (vv.33-34)**

The Kingdom of God is the rule of God with Jesus as King. Because we believe by faith in the Word that Jesus will return to rule on the earth one day (Zech. 14) we can also believe by faith that Jesus is ruling in the lives of us who have made Him Lord of our life. The evidence of His future coming Kingdom is seen in those of us who make it a priority to show to a lost world Jesus rules our lives. Implication being that since we believe He's Lord and King, we believe that our Lord and King will look after His subjects. It also means we choose by faith to believe He can be Lord of other people's lives by sharing the gospel with confidence.

God's promises about the future give us assurance in the present. This is one of the great tragedies in the evangelical church that we are not spending time of prophecy and in doing so we are less confident in the present. Jesus obviously believes the Kingdom of God will come one day. If God can simply snap His fingers and say 'Today's the day for Jesus' return' that also means He's in control now because there have to be certain things in place for the Jesus' return. And that's what gives us the confidence to trust Him now for our lives and the world in general, even when hurricanes and tsunamis happen.

The word "righteousness" essentially means that which God deems right. In the context of the sermon on the Mount, Jesus says our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees (5:20). There's was a works-based external righteousness. They chased after the things of the world ad as a result they despised the people who were not like them who chased after what they chased after. Jesus says we are to seek God's righteousness; a righteousness that is by faith and results in loving even those who chase after the things of the world.

We might even say that to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness is to see people and their needs as God sees them. To be His visible hands and feet to answer the spiritual and material needs of others. One way we show we're not like the pagans who eagerly seek after the things of the world, is to show the generosity of God by letting go more of what we don't need so others can have their needs met. And show them in a tangible way that God cares about them so much that He sent His Son to die for their sins.

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