

“Reasons NOT to Worry”– Matthew 6:25-34

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com]

Today we are going to take a second look at what Jesus says about worry in the Sermon on the Mount. Last week’s sermon seemed to have struck a nerve, in a good way. We looked at how this text, particularly when it is read in relation to the verses that come before it, shows us that there is a connection between our worry and our struggles with idolatry and unbelief. If you missed that sermon, you can hear it or read it online later on our church’s website.

We will shift gears a bit today. We are going to see that though we may convince ourselves that there are many legitimate and good reasons to worry about various aspects of our lives, Jesus gives us a series of even better reasons not to worry.¹ It really is an incredible section of Jesus’ teaching that has helped me tremendously in my own bouts with anxiety over the years. I suspect you will find it equally beneficial. So then, let’s listen to what Jesus has said so that we can take it to heart. I’ll start reading in verse 25 and I’d encourage you to follow along... This is God’s Word...

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But 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, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”
(Matthew 6:25-34)

In preparing for this sermon, I came across one writer who claimed this passage reveals that our tendency to worry is unreasonable, unnecessary, unrewarding, unfaithful, ungodly, and unwise.² I think he’s correct. This morning and next Sunday, I’d like to show you why by adopting some of these adjectives (and adding a couple others) to help us digest the wisdom we encounter in this text. There are several things I’d like for us to learn from these words of Jesus, but I first want to point out the goal of Jesus’ argument here—He’s trying to change our thinking and our priorities.

How does He do this? By engaging our minds. He argues. He lays out reasoning. He’s stimulating our thinking. He tells us to open our eyes and observe things. Look at them. What do they tell us? What do they reveal with a little rational thought? Ponder. Reason. Think. Process the information.

So much of our worry develops because of a failure to reason or think clearly. We pointed out last time that there is an element of unbelief—a lack of faith—in our worry. To correct that, Jesus is engaging our

mind and encouraging us to think. What does that tell us? It tells us that, despite popular sentiment, faith is not the absence of thinking. It's not closing your eyes and blindly leaping with a hope and a prayer. It's not turning off your mind. It's not passing positive thoughts through your mental theater and "declaring" desired outcomes. That's not how Jesus talks. That's how Osteen and Oprah talk. "Faith is a position of confidence toward the world based on what God has said in His Word."³

Your worry problem (which may be an unbelief problem, or an idolatry problem, or both, as we saw last time) results from not thinking or not thinking clearly. It's fruitless worry that is the absence of thinking, not faith. Therefore, to feed our faith and fell our idols, Jesus makes a logical case against worry. He's inviting us to start thinking. You worry because you don't have control and things are uncertain. Other things, however, *are* certain. And a remembrance of those things can free us from anxiety, which is the aim of Jesus' teaching on this occasion.

So then, what do we learn here? Well, first we learn...

Worry is unreasonable because there is more to life than what you worry about (25)

Look again at verse 25—"*do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*" The first people to hear this teaching from Jesus were much poorer than you and I. Most of them probably really didn't know where their next several meals would come from. They had to give thought to finding and storing adequate water for the next day. They had less articles of clothing than you have shoes or ties. So these things—food, drink, and clothing—represent very common worry generators.

It's interesting though, isn't it, that, though our affluence is incomparable, we tend to worry about the same things? We stand within our walk-in closets and lament, "I can't find anything to wear!" What are you talking about? There are all kinds of things to wear! "Yeah, but I wore that recently and that doesn't fit me as well and what would people think if I wore those shoes with that outfit..." How many of us, be honest, have opened our pantries and said something like, "There's nothing to eat!" "I guess I'll have to pay someone to make my food and deliver it to me warm and ready in 30 minutes or less." Third world problems we have, I'm telling you.... Nevertheless, we still worry about these same things and an embarrassingly long list of other things.

But Jesus says to us, "*Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*" What's He saying? He's saying, there are more important things in life than what you're worried about. What *are* you worried about? Your looks? That's such a silly thing to live for. If you live for your beauty the very best thing that could happen is you get old and wrinkly. That's a loosing bet from day one. Isn't life more important than your appearance?

Are you worried about your health and your athleticism? Again, the best outcome would be your reflexes slowing in your thirties, your joints and ligaments giving out, your metabolism grinding to a halt, all systems breaking down, and sooner or later someone mentioning your former athletic greatness at a funeral to a bunch of kids who would never believe it any way. Isn't life more important than your athleticism and health?

Go through your list of recurring worries and ask the question that Jesus is asking. Isn't your life more than _____?⁴ Isn't it more than money? Isn't it more than reputation? Isn't it more than fame? Isn't it more than the grades? Isn't it more than getting that job? Or into that school? Isn't it more than that desired house? Isn't it more than food and clothing?

You know who gets this? Someone who has lost a person near and dear to them. Maybe a spouse or a child or a close friend. In those moments, you'd give up all of the above just to have that life back for a

little more time. Death takes the blinders off. It alerts us to what's really important. It, at least for a little while, helps us stop making mountains out of molehills. There are more important things in life than what you are worried about. That's why you don't care how you look in the hospital robe, when you're carted in the ER from an ambulance.⁵ It doesn't matter anymore. Life is more important than your vanity.

But I think Jesus may be saying even more than that to His followers (or at least alluding to some ideas that will be revealed later in His ministry and the ministry of the Apostles). Your physical life needs food in order to be sustained. It needs clothing or else it will freeze. Those things are very important. Vital, in fact. Indeed, you'd be hard-pressed to come up with two more essential items than those. Unless, of course, by "life" Jesus means more than our "physical life." The Greek word that stands behind the translation "life" is the most common word for "soul." One popular writer explains it like this:

“...life and body (literally ‘soul’ and body) are more than the physical life that is sustained by food and adorned by clothing. In other words, don't be anxious about your soul and your body because those who might take your food and your clothing, and even cause your death, cannot take your real life or rob you of your resurrection body. The bottom line defense against anxiety is: in Christ you are immortal, and to die is gain. That's why Jesus says in Luke 12:4, ‘Do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do.’ In other words, there is something far worse than death, and it can never happen to you in Christ. So don't be anxious.”⁶

In Christ those things are certain. What you're worried about is not certain. But aren't the settled things more important than what you're worried about? So rejoice in what Jesus has accomplished for His people through His cross and resurrection. Think about what that means for you and your future. Let that settled reality put things in perspective for you. This is how you experience freedom from your worry.

Next, Jesus shows us,

Worry is unnecessary because you matter more to God than you realize (26)

Jesus says in verse 26, “*Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?*” This is a very interesting verse to me because it's built on two premises. The first one has to do with providence and the second with value.

Consider the providence element. Jesus encourages us to look around at the birds and observe. You never see a bird planting a garden or driving a combine. But you have seen them flying off with a worm. What is that? That's providence. That's God providing food for a bird. Now let that blow your mind for a second. Jesus is suggesting that God is so absolutely sovereign over the entire universe that He may be described as the One who fed the bird when that bird snatched up the worm. What does that say about the level of God's sovereignty? The level of His control? And care? It says the same thing that Scripture says in various ways elsewhere. Paul said to the Ephesians, for example, that God “*works all things according to the counsel of His will*” (Ephesians 1:11). In Romans, He's described as working “*all things*” together for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purposes (Romans 8:28). Biblical example after example could be cited as illustration.

This is what theologians refer to as the doctrine of divine providence. It's nuanced in various ways by theologians, depending on where they find themselves on the theological spectrum. At the very least the doctrine teaches that the circumstances in your life could have been prevented by God and yet He for some reason allowed them for His good purposes. Or, at the very most, that God willed them in a strongest sense of the idea that does not attribute any evil to God. Either way, by implication, it means that

God has some purpose for your circumstances and that everything you have been given is part of God's provisions. That's a big deal. And that's a big deal for your struggle with anxiety.

God wants you to see His sovereign care for His creation. He wants you to see the birds eating and be reminded that what you're witnessing is God feeding His creation. He wants you to see Him as the One who both created and cares for the birds. And then He wants you to extrapolate from that realization, that God must be mindful of you, your situation, and your needs. More than that, He wants you to see that if He takes care of birds, then He will certainly provide what you need because you are more valuable to Him than birds.

You may be thinking, "How can you say that preacher?" I can say it, because Jesus just said it. There are at least two ways He shows this. The first you can't see in English, so you'll just have to take my word for it. In the original language that Matthew wrote, there are several ways to write a negated rhetorical question. And one of the beauties of the Greek language is that you can write those questions in a way that shows the readers if you are expecting a positive—"yes"—answer or a negative—"no"—answer.⁷ When Jesus asks in verse 26, "*Are you not more valuable than [the birds]?*", it's written in a way that suggests the obvious answer is "yes, you are indeed more valuable than birds!" (For what it's worth, the question in verse 25 expects an affirmative answer for the same reason).

The second clue is in how God is described. Jesus says that "*your*" heavenly Father feeds the birds, not *their* heavenly Father feeds them. They relate to God as their Creator. We do too. But have also been created in His image. The birds have not. We've been bought by His Son's death and resurrection and sealed by His Spirit. More than that, through faith in Christ, we have also been adopted into God's family. He is our Father. We are not just His creatures. We're His children. That reality should reassure us that if He takes care of His mere creatures, how much more will He take care of His children! So stop worrying, Jesus says. You're more valuable to God than you realize. You're more valuable to Him than the birds you see Him caring for. That's the logic.

That doesn't mean that the animals are not valuable to God. It doesn't mean that they shouldn't be valuable to us. Animal cruelty is wrong. It's wicked and inexcusable. We were created with a kind of delegated dominion over the animals, but that doesn't give license for abuse. We have a responsibility and stewardship to treat God's creations with dignity and care. But as valuable as God's creations are, they are not more valuable than humankind from God's perspective according to Jesus.

It doesn't surprise me that we have trouble remembering this and grasping the implications of this, because there is a lot of confusion on this issue throughout our society. We've seen a pair of very public illustrations of this here lately in the national media. One of them involved some dentist hunting down an African lion named Cecil (if you can call that "hunting"). A roaring mob (If you'll pardon the pun) of commentators across the nation and through social media condemned the dentist and spoke out against animal cruelty.

Now I don't pretend to understand big game hunting, particularly for things like lions. You going to eat a lion? It makes me sick and uncomfortable thinking about it, if I'm completely honest. I don't get it and I don't need you to try to explain it. But there is something that is even more troubling to me. Before anyone even heard of that lion or that dentist, we were at least two videos into the Planned Parenthood controversy. Many people in our country were seeing for the first time some of the heinous realities of abortion market, and I use the word "market" intentionally because those videos were highlighting the commercial activity that goes on behind the scenes. It's disgusting. It's evil. There is now no excuse for the world to just look the other way and pretend we didn't know.

The tragic irony of it all was that the vast majority of those outraged by the fate of Cecil the lion were not responding with the same vitriol to the comments of Cecile Richards, the president of Planned Parenthood, as she defended against the leaked videos and apologized not for the acts themselves but for the poor judgment and “tone” of her staff members. She means for us to believe that the acts and words of some of her top doctors “only appear monstrous because of entrapment and magic video editing”⁸, and that the people who released the video (including the unedited versions) are merely terrorists and murderers, and that her employees caught on film sipping wine as they negotiate the price of body parts are the good guys and are really just being misunderstood, because, you know, trying to up the price after saying “I want a Lamborghini” has nothing to do with profiting and everything to do with women’s health (to say nothing of the woman aborted, of course). But do you see my point? There were a lot of people in our society who cared a lot about Cecil the lion (perhaps for good reasons) and yet didn’t give a lion’s behind about the comments of Cecile Richards.

What has happened the conscience of our society? Something is dangerously wrong when we clamor for the humane treatment of lions while not offering the same humaneness to humans until they reach a certain size or find themselves on the outside of the womb, just a few inches removed from their current location at any given moment during a pregnancy. This is *the* issue that we will look back on one day, when the death toll blocks out the sun, and cry out, “what were we thinking? How could we have been so blind?” (much like our generations do now looking back on American slavery). How did we get to the point when so many defenseless children have been recast as disposable inconveniences or mere tissue that is worth more, evidently, to some in the medical world dead than alive. This is not an attack on women’s health, this is a defense of the health the unborn. Almost 60 million of whom have had their lives terminated by documented abortions in the United States alone since the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision.⁹ 60 million! Most of those children were probably women, by the way. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, in recent years, over 40% of all unintended pregnancies are terminated by abortion.

Those are the two stories that garnered the most media attention in recent weeks, at least until the next thing rolled around. And what a telling commentary they provided for the state of our society. Kevin Williamson in an editorial post summarized well,

“...we’re treated to the spectacle of Twitter mobs composed of people who have never thought about the condition of lions, or the condition of...Zimbabwe, emoting with great satisfaction for a minute and a half until they move on to the next thing. Pretty lion, mean dentist. Mean, mean dentist. But Cecile Richards’s butchery, those dishes full of tiny hands and feet and hearts and brains, the blasé negotiations about price...and all the rest of that? Oh, there’s context, don’t you know.”¹⁰

To which I’d add, we don’t need more context really, we just need our collective conscience back. We need a conscience that’s not so callous and numb that it sits comfortably by while another million are added to that number every year in our country alone. We need people with spine enough to speak the truth in love even when it’s not deemed politically correct, so that these atrocities will be a depressing memory in a history book for the next generations. We need to stop pretending it’s no big deal or that personhood is really that controversial. And even if it was, why not err on the side that doesn’t risk ending a person’s life? We need a work of God. We need a miracle. And we need to take to heart what God has said.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us to be peacemakers. Part of being a peacemaker means standing up for justice for those who cannot stand up for themselves. But you need to hear this too, so listen up—part of being a peacemaker means holding out the Gospel to those who mourn the decision that has haunted them and extending the same mercy that we ourselves needed just as badly from God (“blessed

are the merciful,” Jesus also says). And part of being a peacemaker means saying, what Jesus said in the Beatitudes to those mourners, “God will comfort. Don’t run from God. Run to Him. He will heal you. He will receive you. He will forgive you. He will comfort you. He has promised to wipe away the tears in time. He loves you. There is nothing you’ve done that has changed that. We love you. Listen, we love you too. You’re in a safe place. We’re in the same boat ultimately when it comes to sin and we can experience the same forgiveness from the same Savior.” That’s the beauty of the Gospel. Yes, we are great sinners. But Jesus is a greater Savior!

Now let me connect the dots with this text. While there are many around the world who would have us believe that people of a certain age, size, race, gender, nationality, economic standing, or whatever have less value, Jesus is saying something different in this text. He’s saying you’re valuable to God. All of you. The world may devalue you or some of you. But you matter to God. You matter more to God than lions and birds. Look at the birds. Look at how God cares for them. He cares about you more than those birds.

Here in Matthew, the word used for “birds” is a generic word that could refer to any kind of bird. But in the parallel account in Luke, the word is different. It’s the word for “raven” or “crow.” I think that word sharpens this point. As far as birds are concerned in our eyes, ravens are probably on the bottom rung, aren’t they? They are savvy, yet dirty and aggressive. They’re annoying. They’re pests. They scavenge. Yet God takes care of even them. Nobody cares about ravens and crows. Nobody but God, that is. How much more than do you think God cares for His children. That’s Jesus’ point. He cares about you. He knows everything about you and He cares about you. He cares about you more than you know. So don’t worry. Your Father in heaven loves you. So Jesus says, “*do not be anxious about your life.*”

There is so much more He says here to help with our worry, but we don’t have any more time today. We will have to pick up here next time. But there is at least one more thing we must say before we close. Ultimately, the observation that convinces us that God cares, more than watching His providence for the birds of the air, is considering His providence for us displayed on the cross of Christ.

You see, God didn’t send His Son to take on the life of a plant or animal, He sent Him to take on our humanity. Jesus became man. That’s the incarnation, God taking on human flesh. He did this to redeem sinful humanity. He lived the life we failed to live. He willingly laid down His life on the cross as a sacrifice for our sin. He substituted Himself on that tree so that we would not ever have to experience the wrath of God toward sin. He absorbed the full brunt of what sinners like us deserve from God. And He rose from the dead, defeating death once and for all for His people. He lives today and extends to us the offer of forgiveness and life. He alone can save us from what our sins deserve. He alone can bring us into right relationship with God. He has done all the work needed to purchase that salvation, what remains is for you to believe.

Will you turn from your sin today, confessing it to the Lord and admitting your need for salvation? Will you turn to the Lord Jesus to save you, apart from anything you could do to earn it? Will you receive the salvation that Christ alone made possible through His death and resurrection?

If you would turn to God with that disposition of faith, He would save you today. He’d forgive every single one of your sins. God would adopt you as a child today. These things Jesus says about worry will make a lot more sense to you given that new relationship. You’ll worry less knowing that the most important thing you need in this life—which is salvation for the next—is settled and certain thanks to Jesus. So I invite you to Him today. I invite you to come forward during this next song of invitation, if you are ready to take that step of faith.

Let’s pray...

¹ In a helpful article, David Powlison writes, “When you think about it, you have good reasons to worry.

² Michael Andrus, “The Utter Foolishness of Worry,” a sermon preached on March 25, 2007, as part of a sermon series based on the Sermon on the Mount.

³ Timothy Keller, “Seeking the Kingdom,” a sermon preached on June 3, 1990, to Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, NY.

⁴ Powlison, 59.

⁵ Andrus, 3.

⁶ John Piper, “Don’t Be Anxious, Lay Up Treasure in Heaven, Part 2,” preach to Bethlehem Baptist Church on March 9, 2009.

⁷ For more on this phenomenon see Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, reprinted 2005), 278.

⁸ <http://thefederalist.com/2015/07/27/the-4-most-embarrassing-things-cecile-richards-said-in-defense-of-planned-parenthood/>

⁹ <http://www.numberofabortions.com>

¹⁰ <http://www.nationalreview.com/cecil-the-lion-and-cecile-richards-no-humaneness-for-humans>