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Why Worry?

Matthew 6:24-34

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In the second half of Matthew chapter 6, in verses 19-34 Jesus is emphasizing the importance of not trusting in physical or material substances, but trusting in our loving God above all else. He speaks of the futility of building up treasures on earth which will rot, wear out, or might be stolen or lost and the wisdom of storing up treasure in heaven.

If our eyes are focused on the right things they will reflect the light of Lord. Today Jesus talks very plainly and directly that we all must choose who or what we are going to serve in life and the importance of where we place our trust and confidence. Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and loved the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and wealth.

Therefore, I tell you, **do not worry** about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? *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?

And can any of you by **worrying** add a single hour to your span of life?

And **why do you worry** about clothing? *Consider the lilies of the field*, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you – *you of little faith*?

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring **worries** of its own.

Today's trouble is enough for today."

This is one of my favorite passages in the New Testament and one I have tried to take to heart for much of my life. I have to say right up front that some people are more or less likely to worry depending on their temperament or personality and as a result

have more or less difficulty with what Jesus is saying. My mother worries about everything. She doesn't like this passage at all. However, we all have to wrestle with the fact that whoever we are and however God has made us, there are aspects of following Jesus and doing what he says that we may find easier or harder than others. That doesn't change the fact that **Jesus clearly, plainly, and repeatedly tells us in these verses not to worry about our life, what we will eat, drink, wear, the length of our life, or the future.**

Let's be clear Jesus is not forbidding wise, ordinary, prudent foresight. The Bible tells us in various places that we are to work hard, to be diligent in our responsibilities, to care for our family, and to help provide for others. These things all take dedication, purpose, and planning. Jesus is not advocating being foolish, thriftless, lazy or reckless. What Jesus is forbidding is anxious, fearful anxiety, about our life, what we'll eat, drink, and wear, how long we'll live or the future. He forbids this kind of worry both because it reflects a lack of faith and trust in God and because it is harmful to our very lives.

Generally speaking, worry doesn't help anything but it hurts everything. Worry is useless and can actually raise our blood pressure, lead to headaches and other stress induced ailments, even heart attacks. Worrying doesn't add to our life, it is actually more likely to shorten it! The truth is you cannot overestimate the unimportance of practically everything. When Jesus encourages us to look at the birds and to consider the lilies of the field, it is a way of saying, "Open your eyes, look up and look down, look all around you and you will see God at work, and reasons not to worry but to have faith and to trust God with your life."

When Jesus says, "*Look at the birds of the air,*" many of us who are bird lovers are happy to do so. Jesus, who was such an astute observer of nature and everyday life, notes that birds don't sow, reap or gather into barns, yet God feeds them. Some of us might say, "God feeds them through me because I put out seed and suet," and that would be true. God often provides for birds and for people through others. Birds don't sit in their nest expecting food to fall into their mouths unless they are babies. Mature birds work hard to find food, but they don't worry about it, it is just what they do. Mature Christians act the same as mature birds; we go about our daily business trusting that the God who gave us life can be trusted to preserve our life by providing for our needs.

Clarence Jordan was a terrific and courageous Christian who in 1942 founded Koinonia Farm in south Georgia as an experiment in Christian communal living which proclaimed that in Christ walls of culture, race, and status have been torn down. This

was a very radical stance to take in segregated Georgia in 1942. The establishment of Koinonia Farm was an illustration of today's text. Jordan wrote, "In the establishment of Koinonia Farm, I remember quite well that we were supposed to pay the fellow \$2,500 down. Martin England, who was a missionary under the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society to Burma, (perhaps the Down's knew him) and I started it together. We agreed on the common purse and I had the idea that Martin was loaded. I don't know why I should think that, he being an American Baptist missionary, but he talked about, *"Let's do this and let's do that,"* and I said, *"Yeah, let's do"* and I thought he had the money. And so I said, *"Let's do this and let's do that"* and he said, *"Yeah, let's do,"* and when we finally pooled our common assets, we had \$57.13. We were three weeks from the time we had agreed to pay \$2500 down! To make a long story short, we put down that \$2500.

A fellow brought it to us and said the Lord had sent him with it.

I didn't question him – we took it right quick before the Lord changed his mind.

Years later, a newspaper reporter came out there and asked, *"Who finances this project?"* Well, all along, folks who had helped us said that the Lord had sent them, so I said this to this newspaper reporter, *"The Lord does."*

"Yeah," he said, *"I know. But who supports it?"*

I said, *"The Lord."*

"Yeah I know," he said, *"but who, who, who, uh, who – you know what I'm talking about. Who's back of it?"*

I said, *"The Lord."*

He said, *"But what I mean is, how do you pay your bills?"*

I said, *"By check."*

"But," he said, *"I mean – hell, don't you know what I mean?"*

I said, *"Yeah, friend, I know what you mean. The trouble is you don't know what I mean!"*¹ If one is outside the kingdom of God, it is hard to understand the trust that is part of believing in God and following Christ. Those of us who have committed ourselves to Jesus understand that there is no way we can give more to him, who gave his very life for us on the cross, than he has already given to us. What we give financially and of our time can be significant, but it still pales in comparison to the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. We know that God who did not withhold even the life of

¹ The Substance of Faith and other Cotton Patch Sermons By Clarence Jordan, Edited by Dallas Lee, (New York: Association Press, 1972), 85.

God's own Son, will take care of the necessities we need to live as we seek to live faithfully with the kingdom of God as our first priority.

Trusting and giving are simply part of *"Striving first for the kingdom."* The first people who followed Jesus gave a great deal of themselves in every way and gave up a great deal in order to follow Christ and to pursue the kingdom of God. They left their homes, families, and in some cases, their jobs to be with and to serve the Lord. Others who believed in Jesus and the work God was doing through him gave significantly of their resources so that the Lord could carry on his ministry. The level of commitment of the disciples can be heard in Peter's statement to Jesus in Luke 18:28-30, *"Look we have left our homes and followed you."* And Jesus said to them, *"Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life."*

You notice that *Peter* asks the question, but Jesus says, *"to them,"* because Peter is expressing an ages old question that is on the minds of all the disciples, *"What are we going to get? What's in it for me? Are we going to make out all right?"* Jesus assures them that when we put what is good *"for the sake of the kingdom of God,"* first in our lives then we will be blessed both in this age and in the age to come with eternal life. A few of us attended an excellent presentation that Pastor Bob Baker of South Chatham Community Church gave at BBC Thursday evening about the mission trip to Biloxi, Mississippi to help the survivors of Katrina to rebuild their lives. He shared several interviews with people and a repeated theme was how grateful and thankful people were that Christians from all over the country and as far away as Cape Cod would care enough to come and help them. That is an example of what Jesus is talking about – when we become his followers we become part of a global family of believers who we care about and share with as we are able and as there is need. Seeing the pictures of all the shattered homes and the lives they represent, was a poignant reminder of what is truly important – even more than our clothes, cars, possessions, and homes – that is life in the kingdom of God. All the other things we can spend so much time worrying about are temporary and can be lost, but life in the kingdom of God is eternal so that is the wisest and best place to invest our time, passion, and resources because what we invest in God's work, we have it for keeps.

A group of young working adults got together to visit their favorite college professor. The professor was happy to see them all again. The conversation soon

turned to complaints about stress in work and worries in life. The professor just smiled and went to the kitchen and got a pitcher of spring water and an assortment of cups - some porcelain, some plastic, some glass, some plain looking and some looked rather expensive and exquisite. The professor invited his former students to take a cup and pour a drink for themselves. When all the students had a cup in hand filled with water, the professor said,

"If you notice, all the nice looking, expensive cups are taken up, leaving behind the plain and cheap ones. While it is normal that you only want the best for yourselves, that is the source of your problems and worries. What all of you wanted *was water, not the cup*, but we unconsciously went for the better cups. Just like in life, if Life is Water, then the jobs, money and position and symbols of status in society are the cups. They are just tools to hold Life, but it is the quality of Life that matters most. If we concentrate on the cup, we won't have time to enjoy the water in it."

Enjoy the water, not the cup!

Enjoy life in the kingdom, seek it first, and everything else in life falls into its proper place. Every year when we get to this season of sending out pledge cards asking everyone to make a commitment to supporting sacrificially and cheerfully the Lord's work at BBC, it can be a time of worry and stress. Will we be able to support a budget that meets our hopes and needs? We have the largest staff we've ever had, more ministries than ever, a big facility and property, many mission endeavors, the whole giving and budgeting process can be a bit scary and a source of worry. I have always believed that a two-fold approach will be successful. First of all, Jill and I believe in tithing, in giving 10% of what God blesses us with to the church to which we belong. I know 10% may sound like a lot if you're only giving 1% or 2% right now, but the Bible and life experience confirm that if we trust God in the area of finances, that God is faithful to provide for our needs as Jesus promises God will in today's scripture. This requires faith on our part.

Jesus uses the phrase "***You of little faith***" in verse 6:30 to describe those who are wracked with anxious worry. "***You of little faith***" is a phrase Jesus uses repeatedly in Matthew's Gospel to both describe and chide the disciples. In Matthew 8:26 the disciples are with Jesus in a boat during a storm and they cry, "*Lord, save us! We are perishing!*" And he said to them, "*Why are you afraid, ***you of little faith***?" In 14:31 when Peter begins sinking in the water and cries out, "*Lord, save me!*" Jesus reaches out and catches him saying, "***You of little faith, why did you doubt?***" Finally in 16:8*

shortly after Jesus fed 4,000 people, a clearly frustrated and exasperated Christ says to the disciples, ***“You of little faith, why are you talking about having no bread?”***

In all these situations Jesus wants us to understand we can trust him and we can trust God so we need not anxiously worry about our life our or needs. This week I received the following email from a very faithful BBC couple in response to the stewardship letter I sent.

“Doug, I've been trying to tell you this for some time, if you run into any couples that have a hard time starting to tithe, maybe this will help. We started at 5% and then 7% and then 10%. We didn't have enough faith, but anyway, it got us in the right direction. Then one Sunday, (when Harry was making \$50), we put in our last 5 dollars. That day he got a call from a lady who wanted some painting and wallpapering done. That got us to the next payday. After that, we decided to tithe first. Now for many years our first check is a tithe and we have never regretted it. Once we started tithing first, everything else fell into place. God has blessed us with a great family, 2 boys, and 3 girls and 8 grandchildren. Life has been wonderful. Blessings, Barbara Terp”

After giving cheerfully and sacrificially ourselves as we are able, the second part of our church's approach to finances, has been to trust God to motivate others to do the same and for God to provide for our needs. It may sound idealistic or optimistic but I believe God will provide the resources we need to do what God wants us to do.

I love the story of the young woman who brought her fiancé home to meet her parents. After dinner, her mother tells her father to find out more about the young man, The father invites the fiancé into his study.

“So what are your plans?” the father asks the young man.

“I am a Bible scholar,” he replies.

“A Bible scholar. Hmm,” the father says. *“Admirable, but how will you buy our daughter a beautiful engagement ring such as she deserves?”*

“I will study,” the young man replies, *“and God will provide for us.”*

“And how will you provide a nice house for my daughter to live in as she's accustomed to?” asks the father.

“I will concentrate on my studies,” the young man replies, *“and God will provide for us.”*

“And children?” asks the father. *“How will you support children?”*

“Don't worry, sir, God will provide,” replies the fiancé.

The conversation proceeds like this, and each time the father questions, the young idealist insists that God will provide. Later the mother asks, *“How did it go, honey?”*

The father answers, ***“He has no job and no plans, but the good news is he thinks I’m God!”***

The good news is I think God has provided the people who attend and enjoy BBC with more than enough resources for us to do what the Lord is calling us to do. It is simply a matter of us being faithful in cheerfully seeking first the kingdom of God and giving proportionally as God has blessed us to be able to do so. Worry is defeated as we live one day at a time trusting in God, it says so on our coins, but it is more important that we do so in our lives. As the prophet Isaiah said, *“Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace – in peace – because they trust in you.”*

Blessing: “Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 4:6-7